

# A CHAUCER HANDBOOK

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*Second Edition*



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## PREFACE

There are few poets who owe so much to scholarship as Geoffrey Chaucer. The labors of many men, extending over nearly two centuries and including the work of some of the best minds that have been dedicated to the study of English literature, have rescued the text of his poetry from the corruption into which it had been allowed to fall. The forgotten facts of his career have been brought together, out of the obscurity of scattered documents; and fantastic legends, which had gathered about his name, have been laid to rest. The sources from which he may have drawn materials have been explored, and we have been put in a position to know what books influenced his thinking and upon what foundations he built his works. If we are able, more than five hundred years after his death, to form something like a just estimate of the singular power of his genius, it is because scholarship has made clear the way.

The serious student of Chaucer, even though he make no especial pretense to learning, will naturally wish to derive as much benefit as possible from all this labor on the part of the learned. The teacher of Chaucer, moreover, will hardly feel that his duty has been done, if he has not been able to set before his students the material which scholarship has made available, for a truer estimation of the great poet whose works it is his privilege to interpret.

His problem, however, is not altogether an easy one. The material which he wishes to utilize is widely scattered and not everywhere accessible. Much of it he has usually been obliged to present himself, in the classroom, at the expense of precious time, which he would greatly prefer to spend upon discussion and interpretation. Some of it is of such a nature that it is of very little use to his students, unless it can be placed under their very eyes, for the closest study; and too much of it, most unfortunately, has been presented in such a form that it is either incomprehensible or quite unpalatable to anyone who is not a sturdy specialist, well inured to controversial literature and little daunted by the singular *patois* which certain scholars have sometimes felt obliged to use. Foreign languages, moreover, living, moribund, or dead, obstruct the study of certain phases of Chaucer's work with difficulties which it is impossible to require the modern undergraduate to surmount.

This volume has been prepared in the hope that it may be of service, in making readily available some of the material which scholarship has contributed to an understanding of the poetry of Chaucer. It is no part of its purpose to offer æsthetic criticism, either at first or second hand, since it may be assumed that no one will read these pages who is not interested in forming judgments of his own upon the value of Chaucer's works. To present information which may be of use in the formation of such judgments is the sole purpose of this book. It is designed to give the mature student of Chaucer and his poetry some knowledge of the world in which the poet lived, of the way his life shaped itself in that world, of the language which he spoke and wrote, of the dates,

the sources, and the special significance of his works, so far as these things have been determined.

It has seemed best, in such a work as this, to adopt a somewhat conservative position on disputed matters, and to deal as impartially as possible with unsettled controversies; but the work which has been done within the more recent years has not, I believe, been overlooked, and in the bibliography, especial attention has been given to works which have put forth interesting theories and conjectures. A secondary purpose, in the bibliography and throughout the book, has been to suggest to the student the wide and fascinating range of interests which open out before the man who embarks upon the serious study of Chaucer and his century.

With so large a "feeld to ere," an editor can hardly hope to deal adequately with the material at his disposal. Something, doubtless, has been omitted from these pages through ignorance or oversight; and much has been deliberately excluded. My selection has been governed, in the last analysis, by my own practices as a teacher. I have endeavored to include in this volume the material which seems most likely to be of service to me, in my task of guiding the men who study Chaucer with me into a fuller appreciation of the poet's extraordinary genius.

My obligation to Chaucerian scholars, living and dead, is so manifold that it cannot be reckoned in all its particulars, but I have tried to indicate, in the footnotes, the specific sources from which I have drawn material. My particular thanks are due to Professor G. L. Hendrickson, for his courtesy in assisting me with my translation of Petrarch's tale of Griseldis, and to Professor Karl Young, who first suggested that I undertake the preparation of

this volume and who has given me encouragement and advice along the way. I have had much valuable advice and criticism from a number of my former pupils. Their diffidence forbids my making more specific acknowledgment of my great obligation to them, but they know that they have my gratitude.

## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The second edition of this handbook represents a revision rather than a rewriting. Much of the material presented in the original edition, based on foundations laid by the mighty figures of the Golden Age of Chaucerian scholarship, remains valid after twenty years of continuous exploration of the field. My revision has attempted to take note, so far as limitations of space permit, of studies that have appeared during that score of years. In sifting some hundreds of notes on books and articles, I am sure to have overlooked or to have excluded material that will seem important to other teachers of Chaucer. To them and to the scholars whose studies I have not recorded, though I may have read them with much interest, I must plead once more the largeness of the "feeld to ere." I could not hope to do more than indicate, in the body of the text or in the bibliography, the unfailing stream of learning which has its source in a poet who has never failed to quicken and broaden every mind that has devoted itself to the study of his works.

I would record my especial gratitude to Professor Robert Armstrong Pratt for invaluable suggestions and to my secretary, Miss Margaret Sturgeon, and to Mr. Ignatius Mattingly, Bursary Aide to the Department of English at Yale, for their assistance in the preparation of my manuscript.

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# A CHAUCER HANDBOOK

## CHAPTER I

### ENGLAND IN THE AGE OF CHAUCER

**D**URING the age of Chaucer, England passed through the first stages of her long journey out of mediævalism and came to the foothills of the modern world. Many of the events which took place during the poet's lifetime foreshadow so impressively the changes which were eventually to reshape the life of the nation, that historians have sometimes been at a loss to explain why those changes proceeded so slowly in the succeeding centuries. The tumultuous days of 1381, when the peasantry of England rose in revolt, seized the capital, and forced from a terrified government a show of compliance with their demands, are much more suggestive of the era of democratic revolutions than of the Middle Ages. A refractory parliament, stubbornly refusing to grant subsidies to the Crown until public grievances had been redressed, and forcing a reluctant monarch to accept ministers nominated by the House of Commons, hardly seems to belong to feudal times. The heresies of Wycliffe bear so close a resemblance to the protestantism of a later era that it is hard to realize that the great reformer lived so many years before Luther ;

and the poor priests, his followers, upon whom the conservatives of the age fastened the contemptuous name of "Lollers," were not to find their true counterpart until the followers of John Wesley went about England preaching another reformation, four centuries nearer to the modern age.

These are but the most striking manifestations of a new spirit and of new ideas at work upon English society in this remarkable age. In less conspicuous ways, as well, the same tendencies toward change are made evident. (The literature of the times is so pervaded with a questioning spirit as to make this a great age of satire.) Of the four greatest English writers of the century, one was a religious reformer, whose writings attacked nearly every institution of the mediæval church, from the corrupt priesthood to the papacy itself. Another gave himself so completely to the exposure of the corruption of mediæval institutions that the most radical agitators of the age used his *Peter the Ploughman* as symbol of their revolutionary ideals. A third, though his spirit was clearly made for the most tranquil waters of literature, was so stirred by his disgust at things which he had witnessed that he, too, wrote many pages of vituperative satire. As for Chaucer himself, his work contains satirical passages so startling in their approach to our own point of view toward the decaying institutions of the Middle Ages that they have won him the doubtful compliment of being called "modern.")

(This satirical spirit in the poets seems to have been but a reflection of a way of thinking by no means limited to men of letters. That men and women were thinking for themselves at all, and that their thoughts so frequently

called old truths in question, was certainly an indication of an altered temper of mind. The Age of Faith was passing into an age of scepticism, and authority of every sort was losing its grip upon the English public.) The institutions of the feudal age, both in church and state, were so manifestly corrupt that even those whose duty it was to give them full support were little better than half-hearted in their devotion to the old ideals.

( In such an age of transition between old and new, when a familiar world seems suddenly to totter under the impact of forces which no one can yet understand, men will always look back regretfully to a time that was untroubled by these novel phenomena of thought and action, which disturb them so violently. It was all the easier for Chaucer's contemporaries to cherish the illusion of an earlier and purer age because fortune had appeared to smile upon the England of their infancy.) They had been born into a land which seemed destined for extraordinary prosperity and many years of orderly development. Violent and disastrous events, however, had separated the latter years of the fourteenth century from the period that came before, in a way that was too dramatic for the simplest mind to overlook; and it was natural enough that poets, prophets, and common men, who had to shape their lives amid the raw, new forces which had been let loose upon the world, should feel that the nation had seen its best days. (Stern moralists found in the disasters that had fallen upon England the hand of an avenging God, venting His anger upon a sinful people. The less devout saw the order of cause and effect in the opposite way, tracing abuses to direct causes in the tragic events which they had witnessed. All alike manifested a tendency to date the corruption of so-

ciety from the reversal of fortune which had come so unexpectedly upon England in the middle of the century.

### VICTORIES AND DISASTERS

From the pages of Froissart, we can still gain some impression of the pride of victory which Englishmen had known in the middle years of the fourteenth century. In 1346, on the field of Crécy, the English yeoman, standing firm under assault, had put to rout the chivalry of France. "There is no man," says Froissart, "unless he had been present on that day, who can imagine or describe the confusion that took place, especially on the side of the French, so bad was their order and array . . . The great lords were so torn with desire to advance and attack the foe that their battles did not wait, one upon the other, for ordinance or array; but they charged all in disorder and confusion, until they cut off the Genoese between themselves and the English, so that they could not flee. . . . Those who were behind took no heed of the press, so that they were thrown down among those who had fallen and were unable to rise. On the other side, the archers shot so cruelly and so continuously at those in front and on the flanks that the horses, stung by the barbed arrows, did strange things: some refused to advance, some reared, some kicked, and some, mauling their riders, dashed back toward the enemy under the sting of the arrows; and those that felt death upon them fell in their tracks. The English men-at-arms, who were drawn up on foot, advanced and launched themselves against these seigneurs and their men, who found no succor in their horses or themselves. The English were armed with daggers, axes,

and staves, and they killed at their ease, without resistance and with little fighting or defense, for the French could not aid or extricate each other. Never was seen such misadventure or the loss of so many good men with so little fighting." <sup>1</sup>

The victory of Crécy was followed almost immediately by the crushing defeat of the Scotch at Neville's Cross; and ten years later, on September 19, 1356, the Black Prince won another brilliant victory over the French near Poitiers. "All who were at this well-omened battle with the Prince of Wales," says Froissart, "were made rich with honor and with goods, what with the ransoms of the prisoners and with the winning of gold and of silver which was found there, the gold and silver plate, the rich jewels, and the trunks crammed full of rich and heavy belts and goodly mantles. Of arms and of harness and of casques, they took no count; for the French had come thither very richly equipped and with as much pomp as well might be, like men who well believed the day was theirs." <sup>2</sup> A part of this rich booty was the person of the French king himself, who was taken prisoner in the field; and before the year was out, the citizens of London had their patriotism stimulated by the sight of the King of France, a captive in England.

In those years of amazing good fortune, English supremacy had been as certain on the sea as upon land. In June, 1340, news was brought into England of a great victory over the enemy in the harbor of Sluys. "On the Saturday, St. John's Day," King Edward wrote to his

<sup>1</sup> Froissart: *Chroniques*, ed. Luce and Raynaud, III. 174, 417. Most of the passage quoted above occurs only in the *Ms. d'Amiens*.

<sup>2</sup> *Chroniques*, V. 61.

son, "soon after the hour of noune, with the tide, in the name of God, and in the confidence of our just quarrel, we entered into the said port against our enemies, who had placed their ships in very strong array, and made a right noble defence all that day, and the night after. But God, by his power and miracle granted us the victory over our enemies, for which we thank him as devoutly as we can. And we have you to know that the number of our enemies' ships, galleys, and great barges, amounted to nine score, which were all taken, save 24 in all, which made their escape; and of these some are since taken at sea. And the number of men-at-arms and other armed people amounted to 35,000, of which number it is estimated some 5,000 escaped; and the rest, as we are given to understand by some persons who are taken alive, lie dead in many places on the coast of Flanders."<sup>3</sup>

Such victories as these, with the slaughter which accompanied them, made the name of England terrible by land and sea. They also quickened the national consciousness at home and brought to birth that new thing which we now call "patriotism." The fact that the common citizenry of England had played so large a part in the military and naval achievements of those glorious decades, brought the sense of national power to classes in society which had taken little share in these things in earlier days; and the yeomen of fourteenth-century England must have shared with knights, esquires, and men-at-arms in the arrogance that comes to a people through military victories.

The military glory, which fostered this new nationalistic

<sup>3</sup> Dorothy Hughes: *Illustrations of Chaucer's England*, 122. From the Archives of the City of London, Register F.



spirit, departed as suddenly as it had come. Although the peace of Bretigny, concluded in 1360, made King Edward the master of a third of France, England hardly possessed the power to maintain her position of supremacy. Her conquests could be held only by maintaining large forces under arms upon the continent, and the wealth of the land was not great enough to bear such an expense. During the third quarter of the century, parliament after parliament grudgingly voted huge sums of money for the prosecution of the war; but for all the money that the country furnished, the return in military success constantly diminished. In 1367, the Black Prince won the last and most brilliant of his victories, at Nájera, in Spain; but the victory was entirely fruitless, and the Spanish war dragged on unprofitably for many years, wasting English lives and English money. In 1372, the Earl of Pembroke, leading a great army and bearing a rich treasure, set sail for France to carry on the war from the base of the English province of Aquitaine; but he was encountered upon the sea, off Rochelle, and his force was captured to a man. In 1373, the luckless John of Gaunt, who was vainly trying to carry on the military traditions of his brother, the Black Prince, led a magnificent army into France, only to have it decimated by disease and exhaustion without a battle with the enemy. French commanders, taught discretion by the experience of Crécy and Poitiers, had learned to avoid pitched battles with English armies; and more than one expensive expedition into France wasted the money that had been wrung from the English public and brought back no further tales of glorious victories. Poitou, Aquitaine, and other English possessions on the continent gradually passed into the hands of the French,

and England was left with little to show for her glorious victories at Crécy and Poitiers save a foothold on the French coast at Calais.

France, in the meantime, had formed an alliance with Spain, and French and Spanish fleets combined to dispute with England her doubtful supremacy in the Channel. Since the English navy in the fourteenth century was composed of private vessels, commandeered in an emergency by the royal government, the maintenance of naval supremacy depended upon a flourishing merchant marine. Unfortunately, the methods adopted for securing ships for military purposes were not likely to encourage the growth of such a marine. In 1371, the Commons set before the king the causes of the decline of "la Navie," stating that "the arrests of ships . . . have often been made before our lord the King had occasion to make use of them; during which time those who owned them have always borne all the expense connected with them at their own cost, as well of the mariners as of all other appurtenances, without making any profit in the meantime; whereby many of them have been so impoverished that by insufficiency they have abandoned this calling, and allowed their ships to rot and be ruined."<sup>4</sup> In the following year, the Commons complained "that whereas 20 years ago, and always before that time, the shipping of the realm was so noble and plentiful, in every port and goodly town along the sea and on the rivers, that all countries used to consider and to call our lord the King of the Sea, and feared him and the realm the more, by sea and land, by reason of the said navy, it is now so diminished and reduced by various

<sup>4</sup> *Rolls of Parliament*, II. 307.

causes that there remains barely sufficient to defend the country." <sup>5</sup>

This statement was hardly exaggerated. For the first time in centuries, England knew the bitterness of invasion. Rye, Dartmouth, Plymouth, and other towns along the coast were sacked by landing parties; and one such invading force settled for a time in Sussex, occupying castles and other strongholds, and moving out only when winter storms threatened their communications with the continent. In 1385, invasion on a larger scale was threatened, and panic spread through England, as tales were passed about of the magnitude of the forces gathering across the Channel.

"When it was known for truth," says Walsingham, "that the King of France had collected his fleet, had made ready his army, and had fully determined to invade England, the Londoners, as timid as hares and as scared as mice, sought divers counsels on all sides, and peered about for hiding places. As if the city were already on the verge of capture, they began to mistrust their own strength and to despair of resistance. Men who proudly boasted, in times of peace, that they would blow all the Frenchmen out of England, on hearing the rumor of the advent of the foe, though it was but an empty rumor, thought that all England was hardly sufficient to protect them. Therefore, as if drunk with wine, they rushed to the city walls, tore down and destroyed the houses that abutted on the fortifications, and timorously did all the things which they were wont to do when placed in the direst extremity. As yet not one Frenchman had set foot aboard

<sup>5</sup> *Rolls of Parliament*, II. 311.

a ship, not one of the foe had put to sea; yet the Londoners were as frightened as if the whole land, all round about, had been conquered and overrun, as perturbed as if they saw the enemy at their very gates." <sup>6</sup>

Doubtless the monkish chronicler, writing in the security of the scriptorium at St. Albans, exaggerated the fears of the burgesses of London; but the danger had been real enough. The preparations were made in dead earnest, and the forces gathered for the purpose were formidable enough to cause alarm. The blow was averted by events in Flanders, which occupied the attention of the French; but the threat had brought home to the English public, in a very vivid way, the change which had taken place so suddenly in the military situation.

### THE BLACK DEATH

During these years of disillusionment, when the fortunes of war were proving themselves so unstable, England was repeatedly visited by pestilence. The Black Death, which spread over all Europe in the middle of the fourteenth century, came at last to England. "It began in England," says Robert of Avesbury, "in the neighborhood of Dorchester, about the Feast of St. Peter ad Vinculas, in the year of our Lord, 1348, and immediately spread rapidly from place to place. Many persons who were in sound health in the early morning were snatched, before midday, from mortal affairs; none whom it marked down to die did it permit to live beyond three or four days, without choice of persons, save only in the case of a few rich people. . . . Coming to London about the Feast of All Saints,

<sup>6</sup> Walsingham: *Historia Anglicana*, ed. Riley, II. 145.

it slew many persons daily and increased so greatly that from the Feast of the Purification until just after Easter, in a newly-made cemetery at Smithfield, the bodies of more than 200 dead, besides those that were buried in other cemeteries in the same city, were buried every day. But through the intervention of the Holy Ghost, it withdrew from London at the Feast of Pentecost, proceeding toward the North, where it ceased also about the Feast of St. Michael." <sup>7</sup>

The loss of life in this first visitation of the Black Death was appalling, and the same mysterious pestilence returned three times in the course of the century. It has been estimated that one half the population of England was swept away in these epidemics. The effect upon the minds of men and women, confronted with such a calamity, we can only imagine; the practical effects of the pestilence are a matter of record. At first, prices fell sharply, "since there were very few people who set any store by riches or any sort of property" in the midst of such a disaster; but this natural phenomenon was followed by a steady advance in prices, and money did not again recover its former purchasing power. The loss in human life had produced an inevitable loss in wealth as well. "Sheep and oxen strayed at large through the fields and among the standing crops, and there was none to drive them away or to herd them; but they perished in countless numbers in remote ditches and fields throughout all districts, for lack of herds-men. . . . Necessities became so dear that what had formerly been worth *1d.* was now worth *4d.* or *5d.*" <sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Robert of Avesbury: *De Gestis Mirabilis, etc.*, ed. E. M. Thompson, 406, 407.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Knighton: *Chronicon*, ed. Lumby, II. 62, 65.

This decline in the value of money bore hardest upon the laboring population, who lived close to the margin of sustenance. For a century or more, a gradual process of emancipation had been going on in England, by which the serf of an earlier era had been transformed into a free laborer, performing services on the demesne-lands in return for money wages, and holding his land in return for a money rent, paid to the lord of the manor in lieu of personal service. This process, though far from complete by the middle of the century, was at work in practically every section of England, and free or semi-free laborers were working farm-land in every county. The scale of wages for agricultural labor was pitifully low, but it had been accepted without much complaint. After 1348, however, with money fallen to one quarter or one fifth of its former value, the worker knew that he must receive more for his labor or perish of starvation. The decrease in population had placed him in a favorable position to enforce his demands. Labor was scarce and at a premium, and bailiffs on the manors throughout England found themselves obliged to pay double or even treble the wages they had paid before the first visitation of the Black Death, in order to secure hands to work the demesne-lands.

#### THE STATUTES OF LABORERS

To the landed proprietors of the realm, such a state of affairs seemed to threaten ruin. They took what steps they could to bring these unreasonable peasants to terms by force of the law. In the Autumn of 1349, the king had issued a proclamation forbidding the payment of a higher wage than had been given before; and the next parlia-

ment made this royal ordinance the law of the realm, by passing the famous Statute of Laborers. Under the terms of this statute, which was reaffirmed by successive parliaments, it was ordained, "That every man or woman of our realm of England, of what condition he be, free or bond, able in body, and within the age of threescore years, not living in merchandise, nor exercising any craft, nor having of his own whereof he may live, nor proper land, about whose tillage he may himself occupy, and not serving any other, if he in convenient service, his estate considered, be required to serve, he shall be bounden to serve him which so shall him require; and take only the wages, livery, meed, or salary, which were accustomed to be given in the places where he oweth to serve, in the xx. year of our reign (i. e., 1347), or five or six other common years next before." \* The same ordinance endeavored to fix prices of necessary commodities, requiring "butchers, fishmongers, hostellers, brewers, bakers, pulters, and all other sellers of all manner of victual" to set a reasonable price upon their wares, so that they "shall have moderate gains and not excessive."

It is hardly necessary to record the failure of these attempts to escape the operation of economic laws. The "riche and sellers of vitaille" continued to regulate their prices according to the law of supply and demand, in defiance of the penalties decreed by parliament, and it is to be feared that they often took more than a moderate profit. Land-owners, who found themselves threatened with the loss of their crops, unless they could secure workers to harvest them, continued to break the law and to

\* *Statutes of the Realm*, I. 307, 308 (23 Edw. III. 1349). I reproduce the eighteenth-century translation.

pay the higher wages that had been forbidden. The laborer, who was not slow to recognize his favorable position, continued to demand a living wage; and if he could not get it in one section of the country, he moved on to another, where employers were not so scrupulous in observing the law. "In the same year the statute of servants was declared," says the chronicler Knighton, "and from that time they served their masters worse from day to day than they had done before."<sup>10</sup>

The total effect of the dearth of laborers and of the repressive measures taken to meet the situation, was to foster a spirit of independence in the English peasant and to create a large floating population in the realm. The feudal loyalty to the lord of the manor was vanishing rapidly, and the stronger tie, which binds men to the land on which they have always lived, was breaking down. The natural results of the unfortunate Statutes of Laborers are well set forth in a petition to the king presented in parliament in 1376. The Commons, describing the contumacious nature of "laborers and artificers and other servants" complained that "as soon as their masters accuse them of mal-service, or wish to pay them for their services according to the form of the Statutes, they take flight and depart suddenly out of their employment, and out of their own district, from county to county, hundred to hundred, and town to town, in strange places unknown to their masters; so that they know not where to find them to have remedy or suit against them by virtue of the aforesaid Statutes."<sup>11</sup>

The Commons had to complain of even more serious

<sup>10</sup> Knighton · *Chronicon*, ed. Lumby, II. 74.

<sup>11</sup> *Rolls of Parliament*, II. 340.



consequences of the Statutes of Laborers. With remarkable shortsightedness, parliament had decreed that a workman who had been condemned under the statutes and whom the sheriff failed to arrest, should be declared an outlaw, whom any man might slay at sight. Such measures hardly fostered a law-abiding spirit in the peasantry. "Be it known to our Lord, the King, and to his Parliament," says the petition of 1376, "that many of these wandering laborers have become mendicant beggars, to lead an idle life, and they generally go out of their own district into cities, boroughs, and other good towns to beg, though they are able-bodied, and might well ease the community by living by their labor and service, if they were willing to serve. Many of them become staff-strikers, and lead an idle life, and commonly they rob poor people in simple villages, by two, three, or four together and are evilly suffered in their malice. The greater part generally become strong thieves, increasing their robberies and felonies every day on all sides, in destruction of the realm." <sup>12</sup>

Such laborers as the Ploughman of the *Canterbury Tales* would doubtless have been considered the exception by the Knights of the Shire who sat with Chaucer in the Parliament of 1386. Among his own fellows, the Ploughman's honesty, fidelity, and charity might have won him a reputation for simple-mindedness. Life upon the land was no easy existence in the fourteenth century, and few of the peasants were giving their labor away. Langland gives us a picture of the lean fare upon which the farm laborer must subsist between harvests, when the crops have been bad:

<sup>12</sup> *Rolls of Parliament*, II. 340.

"I haue no peny," quod peres "poletes forto bigge,  
 Ne neyther gees ne grys but two grene cheses,  
 A fewe cruddes and creem and an hauer cake,  
 And two loues of benes and bran y-bake for my fauntis." <sup>13</sup>

It is hardly surprising that men who had lived most of their lives fighting at close grips with hunger should attempt to profit by any opportunity to improve their situation; that they should relax their efforts, as they found the conditions of their life unexpectedly improved by the economic consequences of the pestilence; and that many a ditcher and delver, instead of working with dumb patience through the weary hours, should "drive forth the long day singing 'Dieu vous save, Dame Emma.'"

### THE PEASANTS' REVOLT

In a society thus shaken loose from its moorings, restlessness and discontent spread rapidly. An improved situation and a growing spirit of independence contributed as much to the outbreak of 1381 as the bitter conditions which the laboring classes had previously known.

Laboreres that haue no lande to lyue on but her handes,  
 Deyned nought to dyne a-day nyght-olde wortes.  
 May no peny-ale hem paye ne no pece of bakoun,  
 But if it be fresch flesch other fische fryed other bake,  
 And that *chaude* or *plus chaud* for chillyng of here mawe. <sup>14</sup>

So Langland, keen-eyed observer of the changes taking place around him, records the altered spirit of the fourteenth-century workman. Organization, of a rudimentary

<sup>13</sup> *Piers the Plowman*, B-text, VI. 282-5.

<sup>14</sup> *Piers the Plowman*, B-text, VI. 309-13.

sort, supported the laborer in his demands for higher pay, furnishing him with a foretaste of the greater power that was to come with trade-unionism. In short, the labor movement of a later era appeared to be well under way in England, in the latter half of the fourteenth century.

Radical agitators were not wanting, to give the movement a very sinister appearance, and to lend some show of verity to the charges, brought forward by the wealthier and more conservative elements in society, that the refractory peasants wished to overturn the established social order. There is no evidence at all that the rising of 1381 had communistic objects. The revolted peasantry contented themselves with a demand for personal freedom and the commutation of all services for a rent of *4d.* an acre. When these demands had been met by the king, most of the rebels dispersed to their homes. Among the leaders and fomenters of the revolt, however, were some who seem to have preached communism as the only remedy for the ills of society. John Ball, the "mad priest" of Kent, had been going through England for some twenty years, doing what he could to fill the minds of the poorer people with a sense of the injustice of the existing order of things.

"On Sundays after Mass," says Froissart, "when all the people came out of the minster, this John Ball was accustomed to betake himself to the market-place and preach to them, saying 'Good people, matters cannot go well in England and never will until all things shall be in common, and there shall be neither villeins nor gentlemen, but we shall all be equal. By what right are they whom we call lords greater folk than we, and on what grounds have they merited such honor? why do they

hold us in bondage? If we are all descended from the same parents, Adam and Eve, what can they show, or what reason can they give, why they should be more masters than ourselves, save that they make us earn with our toil what they dispend? They are clothed in velvet and rich stuffs, trimmed with ermine and gray fur, while we are clothed in rags. They have wines, spices, and fine breads, while we have only rye and the refuse of the straw, and for our drink, water. They have handsome seats and manors, and we have pain and labor, the rain and wind in the fields. And from us and from our toil must come the means by which they keep their state! We are called slaves, and if we do not readily perform their commands, we are beaten; and we have no sovereign to whom we can complain or who would be willing to hear us and to right our wrongs. Let us go to the king—for he is young—and remonstrate with him about our servitude. Let us tell him that we wish matters to be altered, or we shall seek the remedy ourselves. If we go to him at once and all together, all manner of folk who are called slaves and held in servitude will follow us, to gain their freedom; and when the king sees us and hears us, he will provide the remedy, either by fair means or foul.' " <sup>15</sup>

How accurately the courtly chronicler has reported the sentiments of the radical agitator, we do not know; nor can we tell how far such ideas as these gained a foothold in the minds of the fourteenth-century peasants. At any rate, the men who rose in 1381 acted upon the advice with which John Ball's sermon, as reported by Froissart, was concluded. They marched upon London, determined to lay their demands before the king and pathetically sure

<sup>15</sup> *Chroniques*, ed. Luce and Raynaud, X. 96.

of winning his sympathy, if they could separate him from the malevolent influences which they conceived to be surrounding him.

On Wednesday, June 12, the Kentish rebels, who had seized Canterbury two days before and had marched up along the old pilgrims' way—"like a tempest, destroying all the houses belonging to attorneys, king's proctors, and the archbishop, which came in their way"<sup>16</sup>—encamped upon Blackheath, a few miles outside of London. Some sort of organization seems to have directed the outbreak, for rebellion had flared out in many quarters of the land simultaneously, and bodies of men from all directions were marching upon London. The mob was but poorly armed and not in the least disciplined; but with no armed forces available to deal with the outbreak, the government of the realm was powerless. The king, the queen mother, Archbishop Sudbury, and other members of the royal council were in the Tower, practically in a state of siege.

On the following day, the rebels gained admittance to the city, over London Bridge, and made themselves masters of the place. Joined by sympathizers within the metropolis, they proceeded instantly and systematically to take vengeance upon persons and classes for whom they cherished a particular hatred. John of Gaunt's town house, the Savoy—"cui nullum usquam in regno in pulchritudine et nobilitate potuit comparari"<sup>17</sup>—was burned to the ground. Their motive was not a desire for plunder, but a blind hatred for the Duke of Lancaster, who was popularly supposed to be the principal cause of half the ills of England, as he was undoubtedly the wealthiest and most con-

<sup>16</sup> *Chroniques*, ed. Luce and Raynaud, X. 101.

<sup>17</sup> Walsingham: *Historia Anglicana*, ed. Riley, I. 457.

spicuous representative of the system of things against which the peasants had rebelled. Rich furniture, gold and silver vases, and other articles of priceless value were hurled out of the palace—and scrupulously hacked to pieces with axes, thrown into the Thames, or hurled into sewers. There were some thieves, of course, among the rioters, and some of the plunder found its way into their hands; but most of the rebels were bent upon the destruction of the duke's property, not upon its appropriation to their own use.

The Inns of Court were next attacked, for the peasantry felt a particular hatred for the oppressive class of lawyers; and the rolls and records of the Temple were carried "to the great chimney" and burned. A proclamation declared that all lawyers should be beheaded, and as the rebels, on their march up to London, had hanged more than one member of the profession, it was evident that they were in earnest. The manor-house of Robert Hales, treasurer of the realm, was destroyed; and because Hales was Master of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, the buildings of that society were given over to pillage and destruction.

For three days the reign of terror in London continued. There were bold spirits among those besieged in the Tower who advised a sally in force, sure of assistance from the more conservative of the burgesses and from Sir Robert Knolles, who was holding his own house in the city with his band of retainers,—a hard-handed company of warriors, who had won a reputation abroad for callous cruelty. More prudent counsels prevailed. It was the Earl of Salisbury, according to Froissart, who advised the king to appease his revolted subjects by fair words; "for should we begin what we cannot go through," he said, "it will be

all over with us and our heirs, and England will be a desert." <sup>18</sup>

Following Salisbury's suggestion, the young king rode forth at dawn on Friday, moving to meet the rebels at Mile End, whither they had been summoned by royal proclamation. In the meadows where the meeting took place, Richard listened to the complaints of his subjects and met all their demands with immediate and full concession. All the serfs in England should be freed; all feudal services should straightway be commuted for a money rent at 4d. a day; a general pardon should be extended to all concerned in the rebellion. "'Now, therefore,' said the King, 'return to your homes . . . and let two or three from each village be left behind, and I will order letters to be given with my seal, which they can take back with them, fully and freely granting every demand you have made. And in order that you may be the better comforted and assured, I will direct that my banners be sent to every stewardship, castlewick, and corporation.' " <sup>19</sup>

These were "fair words," indeed, and, to give them show of substance, the king set thirty secretaries to work, drawing up the letters he had promised. The clerks worked rapidly, and as the letters of the king were distributed, many of the rebels quietly took their departure and returned home, armed with these new instruments of freedom. "The principal mischief, however," declares Froissart, "remained behind: I mean Wat Tyler, Jack Straw, and John Ball, who declared, that though these people were satisfied, they would not take their departure on such terms; and with them were more than 30,000, all of the

<sup>18</sup> *Chroniques*, ed. Luce and Raynaud, X. 110.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, X. 112, 113.

same mind. These all continued in London and made no great ado to receive the letters or the king's seals, but did all they could to throw the town into such confusion, that the lords and rich citizens might be murdered and their houses pillaged and destroyed." <sup>20</sup>

The leaders of the rebels probably had no such blood-thirsty intentions, but enough had happened to lend some color of justice to the accusation. While the king was at Mile End, conferring with such of the rebels as had been induced to meet him there, some four or five hundred of them had gained admittance to the Tower. They dragged out Archbishop Sudbury and the treasurer, Robert Hales, from the chapel, and butchered them on Tower Hill. Sudbury was the gentlest and most inoffensive of men; but as chancellor of the realm, he was regarded as the chief instrument of an oppressive government. He probably knew, when the king rode forth that morning to Mile End, that he was to be made a sacrifice, and he had been celebrating the Mass when the mob came upon him.

The rebels speedily found other victims. The most wanton of their outrages was the massacre of the Flemings, to which Chaucer refers in the *Nonne Preestes Tale*.<sup>21</sup> These foreigners, who lived in a colony of their own along the banks of the Thames, appear to have been peaceful settlers, who had come to England for purposes of trade and industry; and the motives which led the rioters to fall upon them probably had their roots in race hatreds and commercial jealousies, which had no part among the feelings that had caused the general uprising. The worst ele-

<sup>20</sup> *Chroniques*, ed. Luce and Raynaud, X. 113, 114.

<sup>21</sup> *Cant. Tales*, B. 4584-86.



ments in the mob were clearly gaining the upper hand. Looting, murder, and arson were going on in the city; and the departure of some of the rebellious peasants, so far from alleviating the situation, merely made matters worse, by removing the very men whose purposes were least vindictive, and who were most likely to keep their riotous comrades within bounds.

It was the young king, as every one knows, who saved the situation. Meeting the rebels again on Saturday morning, at Smithfield, he showed the most admirable courage when one of his impulsive followers struck down Wat Tyler, the leader of the insurgents. Riding straight toward the threatening crowd of rebels, before they could be quite certain that Tyler had been murdered, he offered himself as their leader, and contrived to persuade them to follow him out of the city into the meadows near the ruins of the St. John's Hospital, which they had so recently destroyed. Thither they were speedily followed by armed men, who could now be rallied within the city; and by this display of force, they were easily persuaded to lay down such arms as they possessed and to disperse. Some of them were escorted through the city and dismissed upon their homeward road. Others made off into the countryside, to continue the rebellion, if possible, in other parts of the realm. The three-days' reign of terror was over. The young king rode back to join his mother in the Garde Robe, in Counter Lane, whither she had fled from the Tower on the previous day. "When she saw her son the king," says Froissart, "she was much rejoiced, and said, 'Ah, fair son, what pain and anguish have I not suffered for you this day!' Then said the king, in answer, 'Certes, Madame,

I know it well. But now rejoice, for all is well; and thank God, for I have this day regained my inheritance and the realm of England, which I had lost.' " <sup>22</sup>

Richard had, indeed, shown himself master of the situation, and he has been sufficiently praised for the coolness and fearlessness which he displayed in his dealings with the mob. Perhaps it is ungenerous to point out that the boy's gallant part was acted against a background of duplicity. From his own point of view, and from that of the classes in whose interests England was governed in the fourteenth century, Richard was doubtless justified in fooling his people; and the fact that he risked his life, to accomplish his purposes, may make his actions in 1381 appear admirable. The plain fact of the deceit which he practised on his rebellious subjects cannot be obscured. Only the simple peasants could have believed that he meant to keep his word with them and to put substance and reality behind the promises which he made so readily. The more intelligent leaders of the revolt apparently saw through the deception, and it seems to have been their purpose to maintain their position in command of the capital, where they could overawe the king and his government, until the reforms which they had demanded rested on a firmer foundation than the parchments prepared by Richard's thirty secretaries.

As soon as the mob had been dislodged from the city, the emptiness of the king's promises began to be apparent. He had promised general pardon, but the heads of Wat Tyler, John Ball, and Jack Straw were soon decorating London Bridge. Armed forces were speedily brought together and sent out from the capital to put down the rebel-

<sup>22</sup> *Chroniques*, ed. Luce and Raynaud, X. 123, 124.

lion through the neighboring counties. They had little difficulty in subduing the half-armed and badly-disciplined bands which they encountered, and the massacre of the rebels frequently followed their defeat. The Chief Justice, Robert Tressilian, accompanied by the king, moved in the wake of the conquering forces, holding his "bloody assizes." Even conservative-minded men, who had little sympathy with the revolted peasants, were somewhat horrified by Tressilian's severity, for he spared scarcely any of those who were brought before him. The king, by his presence, lent his sanction to these severities, on the part of the army and of the court, and showed how little in earnest he had been when he promised a general amnesty.

He was soon to give evidence that he had been no more serious in promising manumission. "Serfs you are, and serfs you will remain," he is said to have declared to a deputation of peasants who waited upon him at Waltham; and on July 2, he revoked the charters he had given. The same deliberate process by which the serfs of England had been gaining freedom, over a space of many years, went on; but the rising of 1381 had certainly not completed its work.

John Gower, in his *Vox Clamantis*, gives us a picture of the horrors of 1381, under an allegory, in which the peasants are represented as domestic beasts who suddenly abandon their serviceable way of life and overrun the countryside, demanding outrageous privileges, unsuited to their humble place in the world. It is clear that the poet had little sympathy with the peasants; and a picture which he draws of the terror and suffering of a seigneur, forced by the advance of the mob to abandon his manor-house and take refuge in the woods, quickens one's own sympathies with

the victims of the uprising.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, with the passage of the cooling years, the wisdom of the simple peasants shines above the wisdom of the poet, as above the shrewdness of Richard and his councillors. What the peasants demanded of their king, and what he granted them at Mile End, would have established, at one stroke, a free peasantry upon the farm-land of England, as a firm basis for a more prosperous and stable society.

### EXTRAVAGANCE AND DISHONESTY

The instability of society in fourteenth-century England was dramatically demonstrated by the events of 1381; it was manifested less strikingly in many other ways. The growth of commerce and of manufacture, together with the large booty captured in the wars abroad, had brought increased wealth to England; but it was so unevenly distributed that it deepened class distinctions and became an increasing cause of class jealousy and strife. The simple scale of living which had characterized an earlier age yielded place to a desire for sumptuous fare and costly dress and furniture. The signs of personal extravagance which Chaucer quietly records, in his descriptions of many of the Canterbury Pilgrims, were not only tokens of increasing national wealth, but evidence, also, of a worldly spirit which gave the gravest concern to the moralists of the age. The literature of the period is full of references to the expensive tastes which were to be found in every class of society, and the satirists return again and again to their attack upon the person whom Langland and other poets call "Waster."

<sup>28</sup> *Vox Clamantis*, Book I. cap. xvi.

It was in matters of dress and of food that this new spirit of extravagance most moved the disgust of conservative folk, who lamented the passing of simpler habits. "The Commons were besotted in excess of apparel," says an account written about 1362, "in wide surcoats reaching to their loins, some in a garment reaching to their heels, close before and strowting out on the side, so that on the back they make men seem women. . . . Their hoods are little, tied under the chin, and buttoned like the women's but set with gold, silver, and precious stones. Their lirrrippes reach to their heels all jagged. They have another weed of silk which they call a Paltok. Their hose are of two colours, or pied with more, which with lachets, which they called Herlots, they tie to their Paltoks, without any breeches. Their girdles are of gold and silver, some worth 20 marks. . . . Their shoes and pattens are snowted and piked more than a finger long, crooking upwards, which they call 'crackows,' resembling the Divil's claws, which were fastened to the knees with chains of gold and silver."<sup>24</sup>

To combat this extravagance in dress, Parliament issued sumptuary ordinances, regulating the apparel of all ranks in society. Trades-people were forbidden to use silver for the trimming of their knives; servants and their families were required to limit the cost of their apparel to two marks; and husbandmen of all sorts were directed to "wear no cloth save blanket and russet, 12*d.* the yard."<sup>25</sup> Needless to say, these statutes were not observed, and they were withdrawn, on petition, in 1365.

The same ordinances had endeavored to regulate the

<sup>24</sup> William Camden: *Remains Concerning Britain* (London, 1870) 211, 212.

<sup>25</sup> *Statutes of the Realm*, I. 378 (37 Edw. III, 1363).

diet of certain classes in society. A description of a feast, from a poem of the middle of the century, gives us what is probably no very highly exaggerated account of the sort of entertainment provided at the tables of the very rich in Chaucer's day:

The boar's head shall be brought with bays aloft,  
Bucktails full broad in broths therewithal,  
Venison with the fruments, and pheasants full rich,  
Baked meats near by, on the board well set,  
Chewets of chopped flesh, and chickens grilled;  
Each several guest has six men's share.

Were this not enough, another course follows,—  
Roast with rich sauces and royal spice,  
Kids cleft in the back, quartered swans,  
Tarts of ten inches. It tortures my heart  
To see the board o'er-spread with blazing dishes,  
As a rood arrayed with rings and with stones.

The third mess to me were a marvel to tell,  
For all is Martinmass meat that I mostly know of,  
Nought but worts with flesh-meat, without wild fowl,  
Save a hen unto him that the house owneth;  
And ye will have basted birds broach'd on a spit,  
Barnacle-geese and bitterns, and many billed snipes,  
Larks and linnets, lapp'd all in sugar,  
Woodcocks and woodpeckers, full warm and hot,  
Teals and titmice, to take what you please;  
Caudels of conies, and custards sweet,  
Dariols and dishmeats, that dearly cost,  
Maumeny, as men call it, your maws to fill;  
Twelve dishes at a time between two men.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Winner and Waster*, ed. by Sir Israel Gollancz (London, 1920), modernized version, lines 332-56.

Even though we were to make allowance for some poetic exaggeration in such poems as this, or in the passages in which Langland turns his scorn upon the extravagance of Waster, it should be remembered that such poems were probably very widely known and carried, to the poorer people of the realm, a conception of the wealth that ran to waste in classes which seemed to be winning their riotous pleasures at the expense of the toiling multitude.

Some putten hem to the plow played ful selde,  
In setting and in sowing swonken ful harde,  
And wonnen that wastours with glotonye destruyeth.<sup>27</sup>

These lines from the Prologue of *Piers the Plowman* are a poignant expression, typical of the poet, of the sense of the injustice of life, as the peasant of the fourteenth century saw it.

Discrepancies in fortune could have been borne more patiently if they had not often been founded upon palpable fraud. Dishonesty among merchants of the age is as often the target of Langland's satire as the extravagance of Waster. Selling by short weight, adulteration of their wares, unscrupulous suppression of competition, and outrageous overcharging are among the practices attributed by the satirist to the tradesmen of the age. The power of the victualling trades in the government of the city of London was notorious, and that it was used to maintain the high price of food-stuffs was the general belief. John of Northampton, during his two years as mayor of the city, had reduced the prices of food; but when he stood

<sup>27</sup> *Piers the Plowman*, B-text, Prol. 20-23.

for reelection in 1383, the king himself interfered to carry by force the election of Nicholas Brembre, chief of the grocers.

Abuse of the powers of public office for private ends was no uncommon thing, particularly in the latter years of the reign of Edward III. At the time when John of Gaunt was maintaining an undisputed influence over the king, some of the duke's henchmen profited by positions which he had given them upon the council board, to buy up the public debt at a reduced figure, and then to pay themselves out of a depleted treasury at the full value of the debt. One of these high-placed scoundrels, Richard Lyons, a wealthy London merchant, when appointed farmer of the customs of Calais, levied a higher duty than had been authorized by parliament, pocketing the difference himself. He secured permission from his colleagues in the government to export his own wool, duty free, and secured the same privilege for other merchants, probably in return for considerable bribes.

Such shameless peculations as these were not so common after the time of the Good Parliament of 1376. The specific reforms introduced by that memorable body came to nothing, as Langland points out in his fable of the cat and the rats;<sup>28</sup> but from that time forward, the Commons exercised more power over the choice of royal ministers. Although the succeeding governments were usually inefficient, the public service did not again reach the depths of dishonesty which it reached in the days of Latimer and Lyons.

Even under an honest government, however, the people of England could hardly expect an administration of affairs

<sup>28</sup> *Piers the Plowman*, B-text, Prol. 146-207.



that brought prosperity, or even justice, to all alike. The nobles of the land, with their armed and liveried retainers, held the real power in their hands, and no central government was strong enough to prevent abuses. In accordance with a custom known as "maintenance," any criminal who wore the livery of a nobleman could be sure that an armed force, all wearing the same livery, would gather at the assizes to overawe the king's court by their presence and the threat which it implied. That a poor or obscure citizen could secure justice under such circumstances was out of the question. The effect of such a system upon the retainers themselves can be imagined. Many of them were soldiers returned from wars abroad, with memories of pillage in foreign territory fresh in their minds. It is not surprising to hear of gentlemen robbers raiding the peaceful midland counties at the head of their own little armies, of powerful noblemen dispossessing their neighbors of their property, under threat of death, of heiresses carried off and married by force. In an earlier age, when the sheriffs under the Norman kings or under Henry II were among the most powerful barons and prelates of the realm, such depredations were unheard of, unless it were along the Scotch and Welsh marches, where the unstable conditions of "border law" prevailed. That such high-handed crimes could go unpunished in the heart of England was one more indication of the breaking down of ancient institutions.

Another abuse of power, which bore more directly on the peasantry, was the "purveyance" of supplies for the royal household. The purveyors were supposed to give payment for value received, but they seem to have been more than careless in the exercise of their office. A tract,

addressed to Edward III in 1333 and written by Simon Islip, later Archbishop of Canterbury, informs the king that "The purveyors of your court . . . and divers grooms of your household . . . violently seize many goods from their owners . . . for which practically nothing is paid; and on account of extortion of this sort, many poor people have not wherewith to sow their land. . . . Likewise, those of your household, in the forest of Windsor and thereabouts, seize men and carts, and horses of the poor and compell them to withdraw from their own farm-lands . . . not only for three or four days, but for more and although it is agreed that they shall be paid for their labor, they are paid nothing And on account of diabolical deeds of this sort, the lands of the poor are neither ploughed nor sown, nor have the poor any property by which they can sustain such burdens." <sup>29</sup> A statute, passed by parliament in 1363, speaks of "the grievous complaint which hath been made of purveyors of victuals of the Houses of the King, the Queen, and their eldest son, and of other lords and ladies of the realm." <sup>30</sup> As the years wore on, this particular form of abuse was brought under some sort of regulation, but the purveyor remained an unpopular figure throughout the age of Langland and Chaucer

The twin evils of purveyance and maintenance had brought the feudal aristocracy into general opprobrium among the very classes which were coming into a new position of prominence and importance in fourteenth-century England The knights of the shire, who represented the small land-holding gentry in the parliament of

<sup>29</sup> *De Speculo Regis*, ed Moisant, 94, 100.

<sup>30</sup> *Statutes of the Realm*, I 371

1381, were not men who were likely to have much sympathy with the peasantry that had just turned the realm upside down, nor a very clear understanding of the motives which governed the uprising; but instead of attributing the rebellion to the general depravity of the poor and ignorant, as one might have expected, they sturdily pointed out to the king the abuses of power which oppressed the countryside, attributing the ills which had so lately fallen on the land to grievances that had plenty of justification. They spoke of the men who lived in the king's household off the royal bounty and at the expense of the realm, of the corrupt officials of the king's courts and of the exchequer, of the "embracers of quarrels and maintainers who behave like kings in the countryside;" and they endeavored to make it clear that the nation could not long endure the "oppressions done to them by divers servants of the King and of the seigneurs of the Realm."<sup>81</sup>

The machinery of feudal society, in short, **was** breaking down. With fierce earnestness and stern simplicity, Langland sets forth his picture of a land governed by the old ideals under the old system: of a king supported by the will of his common people; of learned councillors governing according to the dictates of reason and trained in the ideals of the Church; of a knighthood whose sole business was to protect their tenantry from wild beasts and evil doers; of a peasantry left in possession of the products of their toil and contented with their lot. The passage is a cry of despair: the poet knows that this is not a picture of the England which he has seen.

With more subtlety, but no less earnestly, Chaucer puts before us his picture of a society in which mediæval ideals

<sup>81</sup> *Rolls of Parliament*, III. 100

had become so old-fashioned that only a few quixotic persons any longer allowed them to interfere with their materialistic purposes. His keenest satire, perhaps, is to be found in his pictures of those out-of-date persons, so far from representative of their kind: the professional man-at-arms who held true to the old ideals of truth and honor, generosity and courtesy; the village priest who performed the difficult tasks of his unremunerative position in the sacrificial spirit which had once been held to belong particularly to his calling; the college undergraduate who cared most for books and study; the peasant who could be called "a trewe swinker," and who actually was such a fool as to give his labor away, "withouten hyre"! Modern readers, with an idea that Chaucer is describing life in "merrie England," in the palmiest days of the Middle Ages, sometimes miss the point in these particular passages in the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*. Fourteenth-century readers can hardly have failed to perceive that a poet with a very keen sense of the decay of old institutions was setting before them, in these old-world figures, the exceptional survivors of a passing order. Other persons among the Canterbury pilgrims could be recognized as less exceptional, as men who let

olde thinges pace,  
And held after the newe world the space.

The thieving miller, the piratical shipman, the worldly monk, the manciple, who, by the grace of God, was able to cheat more than thirty lawyers,—all these were the children of the new age.

## CORRUPTION IN THE CHURCH

Most conspicuous among these easy-going worldlings, who are described so genially that it is easy to overlook the satirical purpose of Chaucer's pictures of them, are the churchmen. No institution in fourteenth-century England was so often the object of satire as the Church. The great organization, with its wealth, its power, and its conservative traditions, might have been expected to offer a safeguard against social decay; but the Church itself was a fruitful breeding-ground for the very things which were disorganizing feudal society. A spirit of sacrifice, a respect for authority, an acceptance of discipline, and at least a modicum of otherworldliness were the characteristics which the Church must foster, if it was to retain its position and discharge its function in society. Anyone acquainted with Chaucer's monk, friar, pardoner, and summoner hardly needs to be told that such characteristics were often wanting in the very servants of the Church. The principal characteristics of these churchmen are greedy self-seeking, contempt for authority, evasion of discipline self-imposed in the vows of monks and friars, and a thorough-going worldliness, which not only sought the good things of life, but sought them at the expense of the needy.

"What? trowe ye, the whyles I may preche,  
And winne gold and silver for I teche,  
That I wol live in povert wilfully?  
Nay, nay, I thoghte it never trewely!  
For I wol preche and begge in sondry londes;  
I wol not do no labour with myn hondes,  
Ne make baskettes, and live thereby,

Because I wol nat beggen ydelly.  
I wol non of the apostles counterfete;  
I wol have money, wolle, chese, and whete,  
Al were it yeven of the povrest page,  
Or of the povrest widwe in a village,  
Al sholde hir children sterve for famyne.  
Nay! I wol drinke licour of the vyne,  
And have a Ioly wenche in every toun."

No one would pretend that every fourteenth-century churchman was so thoroughly depraved as Chaucer's Pardoner, or that the poet's other pictures of servants of the Church were entirely without exaggeration. If we make some allowance, however, for the license which must be permitted every satirist, we can accept his portraits as a just representation of the corruption of the Church of Christ in fourteenth-century England. Every point which he makes is amply supported by evidence from other sources. Other writers of the age, both obscure and famous, have the same story to tell, the same departures from ancient ideals to lament. Official documents record the attempts made, from time to time, to curb the abuses which were bringing the Church into contempt and weakening the influence of religion upon men's lives. The high dignitaries of the Church itself have left us their testimony to the encroaching spirit of worldliness, which some of them resisted manfully,—while others made it the guiding force of their own careers. No age in the history of the Church has been without its greed and worldliness; but there is abundant evidence that the late fourteenth century furnished a spectacle of general corruption, from top to bottom of the institution, which has seldom been equalled.

The "captivity" of the Pope at Avignon, which began in 1309, was a conspicuous proof of the weakening of the strength of the Church in its struggle with the secular powers of the world. This situation was followed by the Great Schism and the edifying spectacle of two rival popes, both claiming divine authority and each calling down the curse of God upon all who supported his rival. In 1382, a bishop of the English Church, encouraged by his easy successes at the head of a force against the unorganized rebels of 1381, undertook to lead a crusade against the followers of Pope Clement upon the continent. He secured from Pope Urban the most liberal indulgences for all who fought in this holy cause, and large numbers flocked to his standard, induced by such promises of the remission of their sins. The crusaders made a disgraceful exhibition of themselves in Europe, pillaging the fields and seizing the towns of England's allies in Flanders, and retreating in something like a panic before the first threat of formidable opposition.

"And now in oure dayes," says Wycliffe, writing of this crusade and of the methods used to win recruits, "out of the nest of Antecrist is come an hard maundement, and seith to men in sentence, that hoso confermeth Antecristis ordeynaunce in dowyng of the Chirche, and lettith Cristis ordynaunce, he is fully soylled, and wendith stright to hevene, withouten ony peyne her or in purgatorie. . . . And sithe Crist was maad man I herde nevere more blasfemye."<sup>82</sup>

This widely advertised crusade was a particularly conspicuous example of the use which the Church made of its power over men, in order to serve its own worldly ends.

<sup>82</sup> *Select English Works of John Wyclif*, ed. Arnold, III. 246.

It was certainly not the only "blasfemye" of which Wycliffe held his fellow churchmen guilty. At the outset of his career, he attacked the Church solely on the grounds of its worldliness, deploring the fact that it held so much wealth and that its possessions had turned the minds of its priests and prelates from their spiritual duties. "For nowe," he says, "prelatis and grete religious possessioners ben so occupied aboute worldly lordischipis and plea and bysinesse in herte, that thei may not be in devocion of preiynge, and thought of hevenely thingis, and of here owene synnys and othere mennys, and studie and prechyng of the gospel, and visitynge and confortyng of pore men in here diocisis and lordischipis. . . . And for drede of losse of thes temporaltees, thei doren not reprove synne of lordis and myghtty men, ne frely dampne coveitise in worldly men."<sup>23</sup>

Whatever one may think of Wycliffe and of the work he undertook to do, there is no denying the justice of his criticism in this fundamental matter. At the root of all the evils in the fourteenth-century church, lay this spirit of worldly self-seeking. It was this which drew the parish priest away from his ill-paid and toilsome duties in the country, to seek easy employment singing masses in a chantry established by some wealthy person's bequest; it was this which increased the swarms of secular "clerks," who sought their living in government posts or in the households of the rich; it was this which produced the "heap of hermits" whom Langland saw making their way toward the shrine of Walsingham,— "great lanky lubbers who are loth to work."

While these obscure persons brought the profession of

<sup>23</sup> *Select English Works of John Wyclif*, III. 215.



churchmen into contempt, more conspicuous members of the church body, by shameful extortion and dishonesty, gave the poor people of England reason to entertain a stronger feeling than contempt for the representatives of the institution which was supposed to exist for their comfort and consolation. The begging friars were spread upon the country districts like a plague of locusts. Though they might sometimes win popularity by their easy manners and superficial cultivation, and might exercise some hold upon the superstitious by promising the particular favor of Heaven to all who gave money to the "povre freres," their assiduous wheedling frequently became an insupportable burden. The pardoner, sent out under the sanction of Rome, not only "blered the eyes" of the poor by accepting money for his authorized wares, but carried on a thriving business of his own in fraudulent relics, whose potency few purchasers could put to the test with any satisfaction to themselves. The monks, although they adhered scrupulously to the tradition which made them the dispensers of an indiscriminate charity to all who applied at their gates, proved to be harsh landlords on their own estates and were less ready than the nobles themselves to accept social and economic reforms. In the meanwhile, tithes and other ecclesiastical dues were rigorously collected, although, in the same community, every other function of the Church might be frankly neglected. By the system of "appropriation" of the tithes, the money thus collected went frequently to absentees, who might even be foreigners, living in a land at war with England and ready enough to use English money to damage the interests of the land from which they drew their revenue. Failure to pay the tithe made a man liable to prosecution

known in the days of the Black Prince. The Wars of the Roses were to check the growth of social and economic reform and to annihilate the progress which had been made toward parliamentary government in the reign of Richard II. The Church was to rouse itself to a sense of its danger and to conduct a vigorous persecution of the Lollards, who propagated the heresies of Wycliffe. Neither persecution nor reaction, however, could altogether subdue the new influences that had begun their work in the fourteenth century. It is not strictly true to say that the Renaissance began in England in the age of Chaucer and Wycliffe, for the processes of change had commenced before either of them was born; but the history of their times must always be read as a striking chapter in the history of the new forces that had but recently been loosed in society and were working powerfully to reshape the world.

It was in an age of restlessness, amid the ferment of new life, that Chaucer lived and wrote. Old things and new appear side by side upon his pages, and in his poetry we can study the essential spirit, both of the age that was passing, and of the age that was to come. It is idle to reproach him for the conservatism which is so pronounced a feature of his temperament; and to complain that he shows no clear sense of the irreparable rottenness of mediæval institutions, is simply to complain that he was not a clear two centuries ahead of his time. Among his contemporaries, there must have been many who regarded him as dangerously advanced in his ideas, and not a few must certainly have found his satire less genial and tolerant than it sometimes appears to us.<sup>84</sup> When the facts

<sup>84</sup> Cf. S. H. Cox, *Chaucer's Cheerful Cynicism*, in *Mod. Lang. Notes*, 36. 475-81.

of his career are remembered, the wonder is that he showed any understanding at all of the new spirit, which was at work chiefly among classes in society from which circumstances had held him removed. The courtier who could see clearly enough beyond the comforts of the court circle to perceive the evils which stirred the common man to riot and revolt, the Esquire of the Household who could find a place in his consciousness for the vigorous vulgarities of Alice of Bath, the devout Catholic who could draw such pictures as he drew of corruption in the Church, could not have been exactly a placid conservative, wholly unaware that he was living in an age of new and startling things. In his own development as an artist, he moved steadily away from outworn conventions, introducing new forms of expression and a new spirit into English poetry, and following naturally in the footsteps of the great Italian poets who were the heralds of the Renaissance. He remained to the end an independent and impartial spirit, as the greatest artists always must, too strong to be bondsman either to old tradition or to untied ideals; yet he contrived to accomplish something like a revolution in English poetry. His works stand with Petrarch's and Boccaccio's: in a certain sense, monuments to the lost civilization of the Middle Ages; but, in a far truer sense, the first great works of modern European literature. Other men among his contemporaries are more clearly marked as prophets of the new world, but there is no record of the spirit of this age of transition more perfect than the poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer.

## CHAPTER II

### THE LIFE OF CHAUCER

**O**N April 4, 1357, Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster, paid four shillings for a "paltok," or short cloak, made by a London tailor for a young man attached to her retinue, and three shillings for a pair of shoes and some red and black breeches, purchased for the same young man. The petty transactions were duly entered in the account-books of the lady's household; and there the record remained in oblivion, amid a dozen other trivial matters, for nearly five centuries. In 1851, the leaves on which the accounts were written were discovered, lining the covers of a fifteenth-century manuscript. With the lapse of time, the countess's insignificant purchases had become a matter of some importance, for the man for whom the clothes were purchased was Geoffrey Chaucer. This is the earliest of the many references to Chaucer which have been discovered in documents and enrollments covering the years in which he lived.

The Countess of Ulster was the wife of Lionel of Antwerp, third son of Edward III. Just what position Chaucer held in the earl's household we do not know, but it is generally assumed that he was serving as a page in 1357, when he makes his first appearance in history, clad in the new paltok and the red and black breeches. We need not be surprised to discover the son of John Chaucer, Lon-

don vintner, in the household of Prince Lionel. Chaucer was not of noble birth, and although his father bore arms, an earlier generation would hardly have said the poet was gently born; but there was nothing exceptional, in the fourteenth century, in the appointment of a young man of humble origin to a position in a prince's retinue. The yeomen and esquires of King Edward's own household appear to have been recruited from among the sons of families that claimed no very high distinction of birth; and some of them, like Chaucer, were the sons of London tradesmen. The bourgeoisie of London were already in a position to procure such opportunities for the advancement of their sons.

Geoffrey Chaucer was of the London bourgeoisie born and bred. His family is supposed to have been of French extraction, if only because the name is derived from the French "chaucier," meaning "hose-maker." His immediate family, however, cannot be traced farther from London than Ipswich, where his great-grandfather paid rentals to the Priory of the Holy Trinity in the latter half of the thirteenth century. "Malyn" appears to have been the family name at that epoch, and it has been suggested that the surname Chaucier, or Chaucer, was given to the London branch of the family from their residence among the hose-makers and workers in leather in Cordwaner-street Ward. The earliest record that we have of them shows them connected, in one way or another, with the wine trade.

John Chaucer, the poet's father, appears in the public records at an early age. In December, 1324, when he was not yet in his teens, he was abducted from the custody of his mother and step-father, apparently with a view to

marrying him to a young cousin, Joan de Westhale. The abduction seems to have been a high-handed attempt to consolidate the title to certain properties by marrying two of the heirs; but it failed to achieve its object and is of importance only because the records of the case, which speedily found its way into the courts, afford reliable evidence that John Chaucer was born in 1312 or 1313, and that he was still unmarried in 1328. This disposes of an old tradition that his son and heir, Geoffrey Chaucer, was born in 1328.

It has commonly been assumed, though on no very substantial evidence, that the year of the poet's birth was 1340.<sup>1</sup> His father, having escaped wedlock with his cousin Joan, had married a certain Agnes, the niece and heiress of a citizen and "moneyer" of London, by name Hamo de Copton. She seems to have brought no inconsiderable fortune into the family, from the estate of her kinsman, and we find John Chaucer and his wife engaged in many transactions involving real estate in and around London. Among his other pieces of London property, John owned a house in the parish of Saint Martin's in the Vintry, extending from Thames Street to the water of Walbrook. It is highly probable that this was the house in which Geoffrey Chaucer was born.

We have no record of the poet's early years. Miss Rickert thought it possible that he attended the school connected with St. Paul's cathedral, where the almoner's library contained many volumes of the classics. A statement by Speght (1598) founded the tradition that Chaucer studied

<sup>1</sup> Professor Manly argues, on very reasonable grounds, that Chaucer "was born not earlier than 1343 or 1344." Cf. *Some New Light on Chaucer*, 63-67.

at the Inner Temple, where, according to "a recorde in the same howse," he was "fined two shillinges for beateinge a Franciscane Fryer in fletestreate." A vigorous argument for the acceptance of the tradition is presented by Professor Rickert in the *Manly Anniversary Studies* (20-31). Miss Rickert has discovered that the "Master Buckley," whom Speght cited as his authority, was William Buckley, benchman and keeper of the archives of the Inner Temple,— "the one man in England," as Professor Manly remarks, "whose business it was to have seen such a record, if it existed." The education given at the Temple was an expensive one; but it would not have been beyond the means of a man of John Chaucer's wealth, and it would certainly have offered the most desirable form of training for a young man destined for a career at court. One would be glad to accept the tradition, "Franciscane Fryer" and all, but the point has not quite been proved.<sup>2</sup> After all, we can only guess how and where Chaucer received the education which fitted him for his career as courtier and poet, for we have no certain knowledge about the years of his life, prior to his appearance in the retinue of the Countess of Ulster.

Doubtless he remained in attendance upon the countess in her peregrinations during 1357. The new clothes provided for him in April may have been purchased by way of preparation for his appearance at the court of King Edward, at Windsor, where the countess attended the celebration of the Feast of Saint George. According to the fragments of the household account-books, he re-

<sup>2</sup> The case for the tradition is ably argued by Manly, *op. cit.*, 7-18. Cf. E. Rickert: *Chaucer at School*, in *Modern Philology*, 29, 257-74.

ceived a gift of two shillings on May 20; and on December 20, he was given two shillings sixpence "for necessities against the feast of the Nativity." After visits at Windsor, Woodstock, and Doncaster, the countess had returned, by December, to her principal place of residence, at Hatfield, in Yorkshire; and there, at the Christmas season, she entertained her brother-in-law, John of Gaunt, Earl of Richmond. This was probably the first meeting between Chaucer and the man who was later to be Duke of Lancaster and the most powerful noble in England. John of Gaunt has taken too prominent a place in some accounts of the poet's life. There is no certain evidence that Chaucer's fortunes depended chiefly on the duke's patronage, but the old tradition of a personal friendship between the two men is entirely credible. In all probability, their friendship began at Hatfield, in the Christmas season of 1357.

The fragments of the countess's account-books furnish no further information about Chaucer, and we lose sight of him until 1359. In that year, Edward III again invaded France. His army, marching in three great columns, moved out of Calais, on November 4, and began its leisurely advance upon Rheims. In the division commanded by the Black Prince was Lionel, Earl of Ulster, and Chaucer was undoubtedly in his train. From testimony which he himself gave, twenty-seven years later, in a famous heraldic suit, we know that he made the campaign of 1359, and that he was taken captive by the enemy. Probably this misadventure befell him while the English army was encamped around Rheims, between December 4 and January 11.

He was not left very long in the hands of the enemy. On March 1, 1360, the keeper of the wardrobe of the



king's household recorded the payment of £16 toward the ransom of Geoffrey Chaucer.<sup>3</sup> On being released, Chaucer probably rejoined the army and took part in the futile demonstration against Paris. The expedition was accomplishing little or nothing, and King Edward was soon induced to accept a truce. A preliminary treaty was signed at Bretigny, near Chartres, on May 8, 1360, and Chaucer's first military campaign in France was over. We hear of him, later in the year, carrying letters into England at the command of the Earl of Ulster, who was in Calais during the negotiations for peace.<sup>4</sup>

We now lose sight of the poet until June 20, 1367. On that day, King Edward granted an annuity of twenty marks to his "beloved yeoman, Geoffrey Chaucer." There have been many conjectures as to how Chaucer was employed during this interval of nearly seven years, but none of them is based upon actual evidence. The most reasonable assumption is that he continued in the service of Prince Lionel during the greater part of this period, and that he entered the king's household not long before the annuity was granted him; but it is possible, as Professor Manly argues, that he devoted himself, during this interval, to legal studies in the Temple.

In the meantime, his father had died, his mother had speedily remarried, and Geoffrey himself had taken a wife. On September 12, 1366, an annuity of ten marks was granted by the king to a certain Philippa Chaucer, who is

<sup>3</sup> Life Rec. No. 34. The fact that within two days the king paid a slightly larger sum for the purchase of a horse has not, of course, escaped notice. By now, it has become a fairly venerable jest.

<sup>4</sup> The document on which this statement rests is quoted in full in an article by Samuel Moore in *Mod. Lang. Notes*, 27. 79-81.

described as one of the "domicellae" of the queen's chamber. That this lady was the poet's wife is put beyond question by the fact that payments under this grant were repeatedly made through his hands. There has been some romantic speculation about the early years of their intimacy, but the fact is that we know nothing whatsoever, either about their courtship or about their married life. Philippa Chaucer, according to the generally accepted theory, was the daughter of Sir Payne Roet, a knight of Hainaut and king of arms of Guienne in the reign of Edward III. He came to England in the train of Queen Philippa, who was a princess of Hainaut, and it is more than likely that his daughter was named after the queen.<sup>5</sup>

With the death of the queen, in 1369, Philippa Chaucer's services as demoiselle of the chamber were terminated; but she seems to have found employment, soon after, in the household of another member of the royal family. John of Gaunt had lost his first wife, the Duchess Blanche of Lancaster, in the year 1369; and two years later, he contracted a marriage with Constance, daughter of the late King Pedro of Castile and Leon, who brought him the shadowy title to a throne very securely occupied by a usurper. In August, 1372, he granted a pension of ten pounds a year to Philippa Chaucer, in recognition of her services to his second wife. Two years later, on June 13, 1374, he granted an annuity of ten pounds to Geoffrey Chaucer, for his good services, and also for the service which "our well-beloved Philippa, his wife, has rendered to our highly honored lady and mother, the queen . . .

<sup>5</sup> The records concerning Sir Payne Roet have been assembled by Professor Cook in his *Chaucerian Papers* in the *Trans. Conn. Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 23. 55-63. Cf. Manly: *Some New Light on Chaucer*, 49-56.

and to our very dear consort," Constance, Queen of Castile. Several entries in the registers of the Duchy of Lancaster, recording New Year's gifts to Philippa Chaucer, indicate that she continued to hold a position in the duke's household, in attendance upon Queen Constance.<sup>6</sup> Philippa's sister, Katharine Swynford, was the duke's mistress for many years and became his wife in 1396, four years after the death of his second duchess.

This marriage, which was something of a court scandal in its day, took place many years after the death of Philippa Chaucer. Payment of her annuity from the king was made for the last time on June 18, 1387, and it is believed that she died during the latter part of that year. The poet did not marry again. It is difficult to see how this fact, which is certainly capable of more than one interpretation, can be taken as evidence that he was not happy in his marriage with Philippa; and every other bit of evidence, which has been used to support such a theory, is equally unconvincing.

Whether Chaucer's marriage was founded upon love or upon more practical considerations, it is not to be denied that his alliance with the demoiselle of the queen's chamber marks the beginning of his advancement at court. From 1367 onward, we find him the recipient of favors which continued to bring him benefits, in varying degrees, until the year of his death. The nature of these favors will be considered more precisely below. For the present, it is sufficient to point out that they indicate a reasonably successful career at court. For a few years, to be sure, in the trying times at the end of the reign of Richard

<sup>6</sup> Life Rec. Nos. 71, 133, 142, 154. The first such gift is recorded in 1373, the last in 1382.

II, the position of a man dependent upon court favors was a precarious one, and there is evidence that Chaucer found himself in some financial difficulties at that time. During most of his life, however, he must have been in comfortable circumstances. He and his wife, during her lifetime, received payments from the royal exchequer and other sources averaging more than £40 a year; and during most of this time they were entitled to £20 more, each year, under the pensions given them by John of Gaunt. This takes no account of wages which we know to have been paid to Chaucer during special missions abroad, nor of wages and gifts of robes which probably came to him, during part of his married life, as esquire of the royal household. The average income of Chaucer and his wife, stated in terms of American money, at its present purchasing power, could not have been less than \$7,500 a year. Between 1374 and 1387, if payments on the annuities from John of Gaunt were regularly made, their known income never fell below £60 a year, and it frequently rose so much higher that their average annual income, during this period, was more than £93, the equivalent, at a conservative estimate, of \$12,000.<sup>†</sup>

After his wife's death, we find a very considerable curtailment in Chaucer's income. His wife's annuity, of course, was terminated; and in the year of her death, he disposed of his own pensions from the king, probably in order to realize a sum of ready money, which may or may not have been used for investment in income-bearing property. Even in these leaner years, however, he received payments from the exchequer averaging about £17 a year; and his annuity from John of Gaunt doubtless continued

<sup>†</sup> Manly (*Cont. Tales*, 65) reckons £1 equivalent to £30.

until the duke's death, in 1399. No man with an assured income of £27 a year would have been called destitute in the fourteenth century.

The emoluments that came to Geoffrey and Philippa Chaucer from their services to the royal family cannot be taken as evidence of extraordinary favor. The receipt of annuities was a usual circumstance in the career of an esquire of the king. It has been ascertained that pensions, varying in amounts from ten marks to £86, were awarded to nearly all the esquires whose names appear, with Chaucer's, in the household lists of 1368 and 1369. Positions in the customs, or other lucrative posts, fell to the lot of more than one of these associates of Chaucer; and several of them received grants of wine, such as those given by Edward III and Richard II to the poet. Another form of reward, and one which usually brought in fairly large sums, was the guardianship of a minor, whose lands were held under the king, with special fees upon the marriage of the ward. The largest single sum which Chaucer is known to have received, as a result of his services at court, came to him in this way.\*

In return for these pecuniary favors, the royal esquires rendered services of many different kinds. The household books of other monarchs, which doubtless furnish an accurate picture of the routine at the court of Edward III or Richard II, show that the duties of the esquires included the making of beds, the setting of tables, and other menial offices; but it seems certain that not all the men who held these positions performed duties of the kind laid down in these books. Special functions, as steward or pur-

\* For a full discussion of the poet's career at court, cf. J. R. Hulbert's valuable study, *Chaucer's Official Life*.

chaser, as usher of the king's chamber or keeper of his money, as custodian of the great horses or guardian of the royal jewels, are recorded on the Patent Rolls as duties assigned to some of the men who served with Geoffrey Chaucer. Much clerical work devolved upon the officers of the household. The king's business frequently took the esquire away from the court, on errands of sundry sorts, and sometimes carried him abroad, as the bearer of confidential messages or as a member of a special embassy to some foreign potentate. It will be seen that the services which Chaucer rendered, like the rewards which he received, were such as fell naturally to the lot of a man who had chosen a career at court.

Until 1369, there is no certain evidence that Chaucer performed other duties than those involved in the regular peace-time routine of the king's household. In that year, however, the truce with the French was broken, and an English army again invaded France. At the beginning of this fresh outbreak of hostilities, several men of the king's household, including Chaucer, received advances of money, which seem to indicate that they were among those whom the keeper of the king's wardrobe describes as "equitantibus de guerra in partibus Francie." If Chaucer made this expedition, he served under John of Gaunt. Letters of protection, granted July 17, 1368, indicate that Chaucer was about to leave for the continent, through the port of Dover, "ovesqz deux hackeneys vint solds por ses despenses et dis livres en eschange," presumably on the king's business. The considerable sum of money he carried with him suggests a long journey, but nothing is known of his destination.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Edith Rickert: *Modern Philology*, 25, 511, 512.

This may be the first of a series of diplomatic errands, which took Chaucer to the continent eight times during the next decade. In June, 1370, he was granted letters of protection till Michaelmas, as he was about to set forth to parts beyond the sea on business of the king. What this business was, we do not know; but we have proof that he was not long abroad, for it is recorded that he received the semiannual payment of his pension, apparently in person, on November 28.

In 1372, he visited the continent again, going on business of which we have more precise knowledge. This journey was a very important matter in the poet's literary career, for it carried him to Italy and brought him into contact with new forces at work in Italian literature. There has been a tradition that he met Petrarch in Padua, while on this journey, but the only foundation for the theory lies in the words spoken by the Clerk of Oxenford, in introducing his story of Griselda. A much more certain matter than the traditional meeting between the two poets is the very obvious influence which the contact with Italian literature had upon Chaucer's subsequent work. What Petrarch and Boccaccio were doing for the literature of their land, Chaucer was soon to do for English literature.

Needless to say, it was not in the interests of literature that Chaucer was sent to Italy by his royal master. Genoese trade was a matter of more importance to Edward III than the poetry of Petrarch and Boccaccio; and the commission which he sent to Italy, in 1372, went to treat with the duke, council, and citizens of Genoa, with a view to agreeing upon some English port, where Genoese merchants might form a commercial establishment. The three

commissioners were appointed on November 12, and we learn from Chaucer's own account of his receipts and expenses for the journey that he set out from London on December 1, and did not return until May 23. His accounts also show us that he was detached from the commission to Genoa, for a few weeks, and journeyed to Florence, on some official business of which we know nothing.<sup>10</sup>

During the three years following this journey to Italy, the poet's fortunes mounted rapidly. It was in 1374, it will be remembered, that he was granted his annuity of £10 by John of Gaunt. In the same year, at the feast of Saint George, King Edward granted him a pitcher of wine, to be received daily, during his life, at the hands of the king's butler in the port of London. Professor Manly puts forward, as a "pleasant query," the speculation "that Chaucer's pitcher of wine, like so many similar grants in later years, may have been a reward for a poem, perhaps celebrating some theme appropriate to the feast." It must not be supposed, however, that this was a special form of royal favor, reserved exclusively for poets. Entries on the Patent Rolls show that daily and annual allowances of wine were bestowed upon others at the court from time to time. This gift, like the others which Chaucer received from the king, doubtless came to him as one of the occasional rewards which an esquire of the household might hope to receive. In all probability, the gift of wine was soon transmuted into an annual money payment. When the grant was confirmed by Richard II, on his ac-

<sup>10</sup> In all probability, he was sent to Florence to negotiate a loan with Florentine bankers Cf. Cook, *Chaucerian Papers*, in the *Trans. Conn. Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 23 39-44.



cession to the throne, it was definitely stated that Chaucer was to receive twenty marks a year, in lieu of the wine.

Chaucer was still, in 1374, an esquire of the king's household, but he was not obliged to reside at court. On May 10, he obtained rent-free a dwelling on the city wall, at Aldgate. New duties, shortly to be laid upon him, necessitated a residence in London. On June 8, 1374, he was appointed controller of the custom and subsidy on wools, hides, and wool-fells in the port of London. It was stipulated that he should reside at the port and discharge the duties pertaining to his office in person, writing his accounts "manu sua propria." Frequent absences on the king's business, during the years when he held this office, make it clear that these stipulations were not observed with entire strictness; but it seems certain that for the next twelve years, Chaucer had his residence in London, and that he was occupied, during most of the daylight hours, with duties connected with his office. References in *The Hous of Fame* to the sort of life he was leading, at the time the poem was written, indicate that he was kept all day by the river, over his "rekeninges."<sup>11</sup>

The controller of the customs was appointed as a check on the two collectors, and it was his duty to submit to the exchequer an independent account of transactions at the port. His salary was £10 a year, to be paid him by the collectors out of the receipts at the port; but there is some reason to believe that his earnings were augmented by fees. The office of collector, which carried a nominal salary of £20, was held by men of wealth and importance, like Nicholas Brembre, William Walworth, and John Philipot,—men who could lend the king 2,000 marks or fit

<sup>11</sup> *Hous of Fame*, 641-60.

out a fleet at their own expense. It is hardly credible that these men would have spent time or energy upon duties at the customs-house, if the profits from the office had been limited to the comparatively small sum allowed them as salary. Collectors and controller alike could certainly expect to derive additional revenue in fees which do not appear in their accounts with the exchequer. The only special emoluments of Chaucer's office, which are entered on the records, are the king's annual gift of ten marks, made during his last six years in the office, and a particular grant, on July 12, 1376, of the price of some wool, forfeited by a London merchant, who had exported it to Dordrecht without paying custom.

This last gift was a large one, amounting to £71 4s. 6d., but it was not the most remunerative of the favors which came to Chaucer during this period of especial prosperity. On November 8, 1375, the king made him legal guardian of young Edmund Staplegate, of Kent, whose father had held his lands as tenant of the king in chief. A document dated July 9, 1377, gives us the information that the young man, before reaching his majority, had paid "Geffray Chausyer" the sum of £104, for his wardship and marriage-fee. On December 28, 1375, Chaucer was given the custody of another minor, heir to the late John Solys, who had held some rents in the county of Kent as subtenant of the king. We have no means of knowing how much money the poet derived from this second wardship.

Toward the end of 1376, Chaucer was associated with Sir John de Burlee, Captain of Calais, in a journey on business for the king; but we do not know where this business took him, nor what it was. Sir John received £13

6s. 8d., and Chaucer exactly half as much, as wages for this special service.

On February 17, 1377, Chaucer set forth once more on the king's business, going this time to "Paris, Montreuil, and elsewhere," and remaining away from London until March 25. His associate on this journey was Sir Thomas Percy, later Earl of Worcester. Later in the Spring, he was in France again, remaining from April 30 until June 26. Froissart is authority for the statement that Chaucer was one of the envoys from the English court, sent to Montreuil in that year, to treat of peace between England and France and to arrange a marriage between Prince Richard, the heir apparent, and a French princess.<sup>12</sup> The poet's name does not appear on either of two commissions appointed by the king to conduct these negotiations; but his two journeys to the continent in 1377 coincide fairly closely with the two sets of conferences carried on by the royal commissioners in that year; and an entry on the Issue Roll, under date of March 6, 1381, makes it certain that his business, on each of his expeditions, had some connection with the negotiations between France and England. The negotiations failed to arrange a peace, perhaps because the French insisted on the dismantling of Calais; and all thoughts of establishing a peaceful alliance by a marriage between Richard and Princess Marie were ended by her death, which occurred during May, 1377. Possibly Dr. Braddy is right in believing that Chaucer has left us, in the *Parlement of Foules*, a literary monument to the uncompleted wooing in which he bore a hand.

<sup>12</sup> *Chroniques*, VIII, 226. Haldeen Braddy gives a full account of Chaucer's part in the negotiations. (*Three Chaucer Studies*, New York, 1932, II. 28-48.)

When Chaucer returned from the second of these journeys, on June 26, 1377, Edward III was dead, and Richard II, as yet only ten years of age, sat upon the throne. The new king, on the first day of his reign, renewed Chaucer's appointment as controller of customs. Subsequently, he confirmed the poet's annuity of twenty marks and granted him another twenty marks a year in lieu of the daily pitcher of wine. Evidently, the change of monarchs made little difference in Chaucer's fortunes. He is still referred to as "our beloved esquire" in documents issued by King Richard, and he seems to have held much the same position under the new king as that which he had held under Edward III. The accounts of the keeper of the wardrobe in 1377 show that he was in that year still receiving payments of forty shillings a year for his robes, as "scutifer regis"; and some entries on the Pipe Roll, belonging to the opening years of Richard's reign, indicate that he was still entitled to wages within the king's household. His name, however, does not appear in later accounts of the royal household.

It is perhaps significant that the new regime speedily availed itself of Chaucer's services for missions abroad. In the fourth year of his reign, Richard made him a gift of £22, stating that the sum was given him in recognition of his services as envoy to Paris and Montreuil to treat of peace with France, in the time of Edward III, and again, in the reign of the present king, to discuss a marriage between Richard and the daughter of the French king. This gives us definite information about the objects of Chaucer's journeys abroad in 1377, and may also be taken as evidence that he was attached in some capacity to the commission appointed in January, 1378, to renew

the negotiations for peace and for the French marriage.

His next errand abroad grew out of the failure of these negotiations. While a fresh set of envoys in France was trying to arrange a satisfactory peace, Richard's government determined upon another effort at arms and fitted out an expedition to descend upon France. On the same day that some £4,000 were paid to John of Gaunt for his army serving in the wars, moneys were advanced to Sir Edward de Berkeley and Geoffrey Chaucer, sent into Lombardy to the Lord of Milan and to Sir John Hawkwood, the famous English adventurer, doubtless to seek their assistance in the English cause. We have no means of knowing the precise nature of the negotiations entrusted to Chaucer and Sir Edward, nor whether they met with any success. Readers of Chaucer's poetry will be less interested in the business which took him a second time to Italy than in the fact that he was brought once more into direct contact with Italian culture. It is also of interest that the very Lord of Milan, Bernabo Visconti, to whom he was sent as envoy, is one of the men selected by the Monk, in the *Canterbury Tales*, to illustrate the caprice of fortune.

This second Italian journey kept Chaucer away from London from May 28 until September 19, 1378. To the years immediately following his return, belong two documents, bearing upon Chaucer's affairs, which have no connection with his career at court. The first concerns a mysterious matter, which has puzzled the poet's biographers since its discovery. It is a deed, dated May 1, 1380, by which one Cecily Chaumpaigne, daughter of the late William Chaumpaigne and Agnes his wife, releases Geoffrey Chaucer, Esquire, of every sort of action "tam de

raptu meo, tam de aliqua alia re vel causa." It is not likely that the word "raptu," as it is used in this singular document, refers to the perpetration of a rape. It would require a rather vicious imagination to conceive of Geoffrey Chaucer, controller of customs at the port of London and envoy extraordinary of the king, departing from an obviously even course of life to accomplish the ruin of this mysterious Cecily. It is far more probable that the action referred to was a civil abduction, such as that of the poet's father in 1324. It is even possible to infer, from the terms of the deed of release, that such an abduction was carried out with the lady's knowledge and consent, for the purpose of removing her from the custody of guardians who were not managing her affairs according to her desires. At any rate, it should hardly be necessary to attempt to clear the poet of the charge, sometimes brought against him on the evidence of this document, of the commission of a physical crime against Cecily Chaumpaigne.<sup>18</sup>

The other document belonging to this period and bearing upon Chaucer's personal affairs, is a release, given by him under date of June 19, 1381, of the house in the Vintry, formerly the property of his father. We do not know whether or not this property came to him on the death of John Chaucer, but it seems unlikely that it was available for his use in 1374, when he leased the house at Aldgate; for a residence in Thames Street in the Vintry would have been more convenient for the controller of customs than a dwelling so remote from the river as Ald-

<sup>18</sup> Skeat's suggestion that the "little son Lewis," for whom Chaucer wrote the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, may have been the son of Cecily Chaumpaigne, has not been generally accepted.

gate. In any case, this is the only document which connects Geoffrey Chaucer with the rather extensive property held by his father and mother. Most of it, doubtless, passed into the hands of John Chaucer's widow.

It is possible that Chaucer was led to relinquish the house in the Vintry by events which he had just witnessed. This was the year of the Peasants' Revolt. Only six days before this release was signed, the mob had been raging in the streets of London, destroying not a little property. Chaucer's business judgment may have told him that tenements in London were not so stable a form of wealth as they had seemed. One would like to know whether such a thought was in his mind, and whether he himself, in those terrible days, when the mob held possession of the city, was in any sort of peril. His connection with John of Gaunt might have earned him the enmity of men who made it their first business, on gaining entrance to the city, to burn the duke's palace, and who slaughtered a Minorite friar, "*ob iram scilicet et rancorem quem in ducem gerebant Lancastriae . . . quia familiaris ei fuisse dicebatur.*"<sup>14</sup> There is no way of knowing, however, how Chaucer was occupied while the mob was in the city, nor what his thoughts may have been on that tumultuous occasion. Only once, in his writings, does he refer to the events of 1381, and that single reference is part of the merry nonsense of the Nun's Priest's Tale.<sup>15</sup>

The Peasants' Revolt, to judge by such evidence as we possess, did not interrupt the even course of Chaucer's fortunes. On November 28, 1381, he received a special reward of ten marks for diligence in his office as con-

<sup>14</sup> *Chron. Ang.*, ed. E. M. Thompson. 294.

<sup>15</sup> *Cant. Tales*, B 4584-86.

troller of customs; and in the Spring of the following year, he was appointed controller of the petty customs in the port of London. As he was allowed to appoint a deputy, it is likely that this second office in the customs was in the nature of a sinecure. The document recording his appointment to the post mentions the "customary wages," but what those wages were has not been discovered.

During the next year, the first custom-house of London was built, "upon the quay called the wool-wharf, in the Tower ward," and here Chaucer must have had an office. His labors at the wool-wharf, however, were by this time drawing to a close.<sup>16a</sup> In 1383 and 1384 he was granted permission to be absent from his office on two occasions for a month or more, to attend to affairs of his own, provided he appoint a sufficient deputy; and in February, 1385, on his own petition, he was given license to exercise his office thenceforward through a permanent deputy.

Chaucer's interests seem to have been turning away from London. On October 12, 1385, he was appointed one of the justices of the peace for Kent. It is generally agreed that he took up his residence in that county sometime during the year 1385. In August, 1386, he was elected knight of the shire for Kent, to attend parliament in October; and in that month, the house over Aldgate, which he had leased for the term of his life, was leased to another man. It is not very surprising to find his

<sup>16a</sup> In the Spring of 1388, Chaucer was threatened with arrest for a debt to John Churchman, collector of customs, possibly for an account left unsettled. Cf. E. Rickert, *Chaucer's Debt to John Churchman* in *Modern Philology*, 25. 121, 122.



two positions in the customs passing into the hands of other men in December, 1386. Explanations of this loss of office have been sought in the political quarrels of that stormy year. The absence of his patron, John of Gaunt, and the ascendancy of a rival party, under the Duke of Gloucester, may have had something to do with the termination of Chaucer's connection with the customs; but it is not absolutely necessary to believe that he was a victim, on this occasion, of political strife. After all, there is no proof that Chaucer was dismissed from office. It is at least possible that he resigned, without any compulsion, in order to assume duties of a more congenial nature, or because his fortunes were now sufficient to persuade him that he was entitled to a life of comparative leisure. Such an explanation finds support in the fact that he sought permission to appoint a deputy, and that such a privilege was granted him, more than a year before he vacated his office. The appointment of the permanent deputy marks the end of Chaucer's active interest in the customs, and it is probable that the loss of his positions as controller, whether it took place under political pressure or by voluntary act, represented no serious affliction. A large share of his income from the offices, during the last year in which he held them, must have gone to pay the wages of his deputies.

Speculations about the motives governing Chaucer in the conduct of his affairs are doubtless idle, but it is difficult not to connect the significant changes, which he made in his surroundings and in his way of life in these years, with the literary urge which must have been at work within him. Three of his most ambitious works had their inception between 1382 and 1387. The *Troilus and Criseyde*

has now been dated, to the satisfaction of most scholars, between 1382 and 1385; the *Legend of Good Women* was probably undertaken in 1385 or 1386; and it has long been agreed that the *Canterbury Tales* were begun as early as 1387. The most significant passages in the history of Chaucer's genius belong to this fifth decade of his life. New ideas and new forms of expression were shaping themselves in his mind with astonishing fertility; new material had found its way into his hands,—much of it, doubtless, on his second visit to Italy in 1378. As he turned this material over in his mind, and as he began the actual labor of composition, he must have found that his duties at the wool-quay grew more and more irksome, and that his residence at Aldgate was not the most suitable place in the world for the writing of poetry which was to follow, however humbly, in the footsteps of Vergil, Ovid, Homer, Lucan, and Statius. With the facts of Chaucer's public career before us, students of his life and works cannot ignore his connection with the world of affairs; but it is possible that too many Chaucerian studies have had both their beginning and their end in considerations of the public events of the fourteenth century, with too little thought for the special circumstance that our study happens to be of a poet. It is rather strange, at least, that reasons for the severance of Chaucer's connection with the customs have been sought more often in the political events of 1386 than in the established facts of Chaucer's career as a poet.

Whether Chaucer shaped his circumstances to answer the demands which his genius laid upon him, or was forced into involuntary retirement by adverse political fortunes, his situation was now more favorable for literary

work than it had been for many years. Release from routine duties was accompanied by residence in the country. As justice of the peace, he occupied a position of dignity and importance; yet the duties of the office could not have been particularly arduous. His income was probably sufficient for his needs. We know that in 1385 he and his wife received at least fifty-four pounds, in 1386 fifty pounds, and in 1387 thirty-four pounds, over and above the twenty pounds a year from John of Gaunt. Even if we were certain that he was dismissed from his offices at the customs, we could hardly say that he had fallen upon evil fortunes.

After 1387, however, his situation was materially altered. It was in that year that his wife's annuity was paid for the last time. Probably the sudden alteration in his circumstances, caused by her death, accounts for the fact that he requested the king, in the following year, to transfer his annuity to other hands. The sale of a royal annuity for a sum of ready money was not an unprecedented thing, and Chaucer may have found that this was the only way by which he could meet regular expenses which he had assumed. To realize a large sum on his annuity would carry him along, in the way of life which he had been maintaining, until fresh favors could be obtained.

He had little more than a year to wait before such favors came his way. His annuity was transferred to a certain John Scalby on May 1, 1388. On July 12, 1389, he was appointed clerk of the king's works at Westminster, the Tower of London, the castle of Berkhamstead, and the manors of Kennington, Eltham, Clarendon, Shene, Byfleet, Chiltern Langley, and Feckenham, with the park-

lodges in some of these manors, the park-lodge of Hathebergh in the New Forest, and the king's mews for falcons near Charryngcrouch (Charing Cross). This was a fairly remunerative position, carrying a salary of two shillings a day, or the equivalent of about \$5,000 a year.

On the other hand, it was not exactly a sinecure. During his two years in office, the operations under his direction called for an expenditure of £1,130, which would amount to at least \$150,000 to-day. Chaucer was instructed, under the terms of his appointment, to impress workmen of every sort, to purvey materials and carriage, to pursue and arrest absconding laborers, to arrest "contrary or rebellious" persons, to conduct inquisitions in cases of theft of material purchased for the works, and to sell the branches and bark of trees felled for timber. To be sure, he was not required to attend to all these matters in person; but even with a deputy superintending the actual labor, the general responsibility was upon his shoulders, and much of the detail, as well, must have required his attention. The position called for a display of practical ability, and it must have absorbed much of Chaucer's energies, to the exclusion of literary work.

Other duties, of kindred nature, were laid upon him, to encroach yet farther upon his leisure. On March 12, 1390, he was made one of a commission to survey the walls, ditches, sewers, and bridges, along the banks of the Thames, between Greenwich and Woolwich, to inquire by whose default they had been suffered to decay, and to take steps for their repair. In May, 1390, it was part of his duties, as clerk of the works, to erect scaffolds for the king and queen at the jousts in Smithfield; and in July of the same year, he was appointed to repair Saint

George's Chapel, Windsor, with power to take workmen for that purpose, except in Church lands, during a term of three years.

The official records give us many glimpses of Chaucer during his two years as clerk of the works. We hear of his buying materials for the works at the Tower, at Windsor, on the wool-quay, and elsewhere; we find him drawing on the exchequer for the cost of materials and for the wages of his subordinates; and, on one occasion, we hear of his personally advancing £66,—a sum which was not repaid until more than two years later. The sums which he drew were sometimes paid through his agents, but at other times, he received them with his own hands; and it is certain that he was frequently obliged to carry money about the country in fairly large amounts. This was not an altogether wholesome occupation in the late fourteenth century, as the poet learned to his sorrow. Within four days, during September, 1390, he was held up three times on the highway by gangs of robbers; once, at a place called the Fowl Oak, in Kent; once, at Hatcham; and a third time, near Westminster. In the encounter at the Fowl Oak, he was relieved of £20 of the king's money, but he was officially discharged from repayment of this sum. On that occasion, however, he also lost his horse and "autres moebles"; and in the other robberies, the "notable rogues" deprived him of sums aggregating nearly £20.<sup>16</sup>

This sort of thing was rather expensive, both for the king and for his clerk of the works; and it may well be that one or the other felt that the risks of the position

<sup>16</sup> Life Rec. Nos. 225, 231, 232, 234, 235. Cf. E. P. Kuhl: *Chaucer and the "Fowle Ok,"* in *Mod. Lang. Notes*, 36. 157-59.

were greater than a man of Chaucer's advancing years should be asked to bear. At any rate, the clerkship of the works passed out of Chaucer's hands on June 17, 1391. On that day, he presented his accounts, covering his 706 days in office, and made inventory of the "dead stock," including "bolles, trayes, ladels, rammes, scaffoldhirdles, fryingpannes, aundyrnes . . . i ymaginem eris, ii ymagines lapideas non depictas, vii ymagines factas ad similitudinem Regum," and a long list of other articles, which gives us some notion of the complexity of the operations which had been Chaucer's responsibility for nearly two years. Doubtless it is to the poet's credit that he was gifted with enough practical ability to serve the king in this office, as in others that he held; but it may be permitted us to regret the time and energy which must have run to waste over glass and lead and statues of kings, while the *Canterbury Tales* remained a group of unfinished fragments.

An appointment which came to Chaucer before June 22, 1391, as sub-forester of the king's park in North Pether-ton, Somersetshire, may have been the reason for his relinquishing the clerkship of the works.<sup>17</sup> The duties of this new position were probably far less burdensome than those he had been carrying as clerk of the works, and the office must have brought with it a comfortable stipend, though we have no means of knowing how large it was. The poet was still entitled to £10 a year under his pension from John of Gaunt, and delayed payments of sums still due him, as clerk of the works, brought him some ninety pounds during 1392 and 1393. At the beginning of 1393, moreover, the king made him a gift of ten pounds, as a

<sup>17</sup> He was made sole deputy forester of the park in 1397 or 1398.

reward for his good services; and on February 28, 1394, a new annuity of twenty pounds was granted him.

Good fortune, it would seem, had not deserted him. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that his way was not altogether smooth during the last decade of his life. It has recently been discovered that in July, 1392, he borrowed the sum of 26s. 8d. from a London merchant named Gilbert Maghfeld (or Maufeld);<sup>18</sup> and more than once, during the next few years, he borrowed small sums from the exchequer against his annuity. In April, 1398, moreover, a certain Isabella Buckholt, widow and administratrix of Walter Buckholt, brought action against him in the Common Pleas, for a debt of £14 1s. 11d. Chaucer promptly took out letters of protection from the king, on the ground that he was under royal appointment to attend to many urgent affairs in divers parts of the realm. Miss Rickert has shown that Buckholt had held a subordinate post under Chaucer as Clerk of the Works, and the suit may well have arisen out of some closed account for services which the man's widow was disposed to reopen.

This action for debt and his repeated borrowings from the exchequer have been made the basis for a tradition that the poet was in serious financial difficulties in the latter years of his life. It is possible, however, that too much has been made of this rather inadequate evidence of financial distress. If Chaucer was in difficulties, his troubles were not so grave as those of the royal exchequer; and a prudent man might well decide, at such a time, that it was a wise course to borrow ahead on an annuity, in order to make sure of receiving at least a part of the sums to

<sup>18</sup> Professors Manly and Rickert published this discovery in a letter to the *London Times Literary Supplement*, August 19, 1926.

which he was entitled.<sup>19</sup> It is evident enough that he was having difficulty in collecting his income, and he may have found it hard to adjust his expenditures to the uncertainties of his financial situation; but there is no reason for believing that he was in a state even remotely bordering upon destitution.

He was prepared, certainly, to meet his situation by availing himself of the favor of the king. In the Spring of 1398, he had found immunity against an action of debt, by securing royal letters of protection. In October of the same year, he sought an increase in his resources by petitioning King Richard, "for God's sake and as an act of charity," to grant him a butt of wine, to be given him yearly by the king's butler. Such petitions for royal favor were not unusual, and the language in which this one was couched was merely the conventional phraseology and should not be taken as evidence of extreme distress. All the evidence, indeed, bearing upon Chaucer's financial situation during the latter years of Richard's reign, shows us a man who was not likely to fall into acute poverty. He was always capable of acting promptly to relieve his own necessity, and his favor at court was still strong enough to render the measures which he took quite efficacious.

The butt of wine, which the king granted immediately on Chaucer's petition, was the last of Richard's gifts to his "beloved esquire." In the following year, Henry IV, son of John of Gaunt, usurped the throne. The new monarch was not likely to neglect the poet, who had been

<sup>19</sup> The exchequer was frequently in arrears in the payment of sums due Chaucer under his annuities. Cf. *Life Rec.* Nos. 251, 255, 257, 259, 263, 272.



his father's friend, and Chaucer took prompt steps to make sure that he did not. The *Complaint to his Purse*, with its graceful envoy, obviously addressed to Henry of Bolingbroke, met with a satisfactory response. On October 13, 1399, within two weeks of his accession to the throne, the new king granted Chaucer an annuity of forty marks, and confirmed the pension of twenty pounds a year given him by Richard II. Five days later, Richard's pension and the annual gift of a butt of wine were definitely confirmed by letters patent; for the original letters from the deposed king "*casualiter sunt amisse.*" This accident was probably not a piece of carelessness, such as practical men like to discover in poets. The veteran courtier, who had learned caution in these late years of political uncertainty, probably felt that it would do no harm to have new letters, under the seal of the present king.

With his fortunes once more on a firm basis, Chaucer made another change of residence. In December, 1399, he took a lease for fifty-three years on a dwelling in the garden of Saint Mary's Chapel, Westminster Abbey. In this house, Chaucer spent the last months of his life. We know of no further duties that were laid upon him; and if his pensions were not yet paid with entire regularity, the letters patent from the new king, guaranteeing him a comfortable income, must have given him security against financial worry. On June 5, 1400, he received payment from the royal exchequer for the last time. He died, according to the inscription formerly legible upon his tomb, on October 25, and was buried in Westminster Abbey. The Poets' Corner of the abbey has grown up around his grave.

In the next generation, wealth and distinction came to one Thomas Chaucer, traditionally regarded as Geoffrey's son. Only one person<sup>1</sup> who lived during the lifetime of Thomas Chaucer has left us any statement connecting the two men as father and son, and their relationship is asserted in only one legal document that has yet been discovered;<sup>2</sup> but Thomas Chaucer is known to have used Geoffrey's seal, and on his tomb are the arms of Roet, Phillipa Chaucer's family. Such evidence as we have seems to confirm the tradition that Thomas was the poet's son.<sup>3</sup>

Almost nothing is known of "litel Lowis my sone," to whom the *Treatise on the Astrolabe* is dedicated. A document in the Public Record Office shows that he was one of four squires, including Thomas Chaucer, in the garrison of the castle of Carmarthen during the Welsh campaign of 1403.<sup>4</sup> Possibly he met his death in that campaign.

Thomas Chaucer's grandson, John de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk, married Elizabeth Plantagenet, sister to Edward IV, and their son, the Earl of Lincoln, was declared heir apparent by Richard III. With the death of the earl at the battle of Stoke, in 1487, the line became extinct.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Gascoigne, Chancellor of Oxford University, 1434, 1444. Cf. *Athenaeum* 1888, I. 404, 405.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. M. Manly, "Thomas Chaucer, son of Geoffrey," *Times Literary Supplement*, London, August 3, 1933.

<sup>3</sup> See Dr. M. B. Ruud's valuable study, *Thomas Chaucer*, Minneapolis, 1926. Russell Krauss (*Three Chaucer Studies*, New York, 1937, pp. 7-169) supports an earlier conjecture that Thomas was the illegitimate son of John of Gaunt by Phillipa Chaucer.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. J. M. Manly, "Litel Lowis My Sone," *Times Literary Supplement*, London, June 7, 1925; and *West Wales Hist.*, IV, 4, ff.

## CHAPTER III

### THE LESSER WORKS

#### "THE ROMAUNT OF THE ROSE"

(Extant in but one manuscript)

*Authenticity:* Only a part of the translation is now attributed to Chaucer.

*Date:* Early.

*Source:* *Le Roman de la Rose*, by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun.

*Metrical Form:* Octosyllabics, the metrical form of the French original.

**I**N the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* (F text, 328-31), the God of Love takes Chaucer to task for certain of his literary labors:

"For in pleyn text, with-uten nede of glose,  
Thou hast translated the Romaunce of the Rose,  
That is an heresyge ageyns my lawe,  
And makest wyse folk fro me withdrawe."

It was a curious accident of literary history that made the *Roman de la Rose* a heresy against the law of Cupid. The poem was begun, about 1225, by one Guillaume de Lorris, a poet obviously trained in the traditions of courtly love

and far too conventional to give utterance to any sort of heresy. It was apparently his purpose to set forth, under the veil of allegory, the varying fortunes of a lover throughout the course of his wooing. The choice of a subject, the setting of the poem, the treatment of the allegorical figures, and the whole course of the narrative, as well as the specific directions which the God of Love gives to his prisoner, show that Guillaume de Lorris embraced the traditional ideas of courtly love and had no intention of saying anything in the least degree heterodox.

Guillaume's work, however, was never carried to completion. Whether it was broken off by death or by some other cause, we do not know; for we have no knowledge about the man himself, beyond the bare fact that he lived and wrote in the early part of the thirteenth century. He had written 4,058 verses of his *Roman de la Rose* when he laid down his pen. Some fifty years later, about 1275, another poet took up the work and brought it to a conclusion, adding more than 18,000 lines to those which Guillaume had written. This second poet, Jean de Meun, surnamed Le Chopinel or Le Clopinel, might well be styled a heretic against the laws of love. He was a man of a rationalistic and satiric turn of mind, and his continuation of the *Roman* was carried on in a very different spirit from that which had animated Guillaume de Lorris. A clear, cool rationalism takes the place of the idealism which we encounter in the early part of the *Roman*; and the figure of "Reason," who fills but a minor rôle in Guillaume's allegory and whose counsels have but little effect upon the ardent lover, becomes a dominant character in Jean's portion of the poem. The lover's quest is followed to the end, to be sure, but the action is retarded

by long digressions, which are enlivened, in no small measure, by satirical passages directed against women and exposing the folly of love. A jealous husband, a sensual old woman, and a hypocritical churchman bring a discordant note of realism into the dream-garden of Guillaume de Lorris; and the young dreamer, who felt the first pangs of love beside the well of Narcissus and sat attentive at the feet of Cupid, is lost in the more versatile nature of the keen thinker, who speculates shrewdly on all manner of subjects, from the source of true gentility to the duplicity of women in seeking artificial aids for their beauty.

Jean de Meun and Guillaume de Lorris were both genuine poets, each in his own way; and the work which they had fathered so strangely between them enjoyed a well-deserved popularity. The high quality of the poetry was enough to have won many readers for the *Roman de la Rose*, but the accident of double authorship made it more certain that the poem would have a wide circulation in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Reflecting, in the work of Guillaume, the idealism of the age that was passing, and foreshadowing, in the work of Jean, the rationalistic spirit of the age that was to come, it became the most influential poem that had been written in thirteenth-century France. All classes of readers, whether their sympathies were caught by the one poet or by the other, were sure to find something to their taste in the *Roman*; and the bold heresies and fearless witticisms of Jean de Meun were the more striking because they were set off against the work of Guillaume de Lorris, just as the radiant beauty of Guillaume's portion of the poem shone the brighter because it was followed by work which made a very different sort of appeal. The influence of

the *Roman* can be traced in virtually every writer of any pretense to learning in the fourteenth century, and the poem must have stimulated thought among a host of other readers who have left no writings behind them. Nearly two hundred manuscripts of the poem have survived, to testify to the popularity which it enjoyed, not only in France but in other countries as well.

The fragmentary translation of the *Roman* into Middle English, which is now printed among Chaucer's works, exists in a single manuscript, preserved in the Hunterian Museum at Glasgow. It was first attributed to Chaucer by Thynne, who included it in his edition of the Works published in 1532, printing it from a manuscript which has not since been recovered; and it has held its place in all subsequent complete editions of the poet. As early as 1868, however, Bradshaw rejected the *Romaunce of the Rose* from the canon, largely on the ground of the inferior quality of its rimes.<sup>1</sup> In 1870, the problem of authorship was raised again, with a fresh complication, by Child, who suggested that the translation might be the work of more than one author, and gave it as his opinion that the part after the break at line 5810 (where more than 5,000 lines of the French original are omitted) was better than the middle portion. He indicated that he was very far from believing that any portion of the translation was Chaucer's.<sup>2</sup>

For a score of years, subsequent to the publication of Child's letter on the subject, scholarship inclined to reject

<sup>1</sup> Furnivall: *Temporary Preface*, 107, 108. Cf. G. W. Prothero: *Memoir of Henry Bradshaw*, 353.

<sup>2</sup> *Athenæum*, 1870, II. 721.

the poem from the canon.<sup>3</sup> In an essay printed in his third edition of the *Prioresses Tale* (1880), Skeat argued against Chaucer's authorship of the translation on the ground that it contained imperfect rimes, of a sort not found in the accepted works, as well as dialectic peculiarities suggesting a northern origin.<sup>4</sup> He was led to modify his position, some years later, by the researches of Lindner, who followed up the suggestion made by Child and demonstrated that the portion of the poem now called Fragment C was certainly not written by the same hand as that which wrote the portion immediately preceding it.<sup>5</sup> Influenced by the studies of Lindner, coming upon his own, Skeat was now ready to admit that Chaucer might have written the latter part of the translation.<sup>6</sup>

In the years that immediately followed, very important light was thrown upon the problem by the German scholar, Professor Kaluza, who showed that the work consists not of two fragments, but of three, with the first break occurring after line 1705. In his book upon the subject, *Chaucer und der Rosenroman* (Berlin, 1893), Professor Kaluza printed the results of his study of the Glasgow translation, in close comparison with the French original, and gave it as his opinion that both Fragment A and Fragment C might well be Chaucer's. His conclusions were not accepted by all Chaucerians. Lounsbury still argued for Chaucer's

<sup>3</sup> In an article published in 1886 (*Englische Studien*, 9, 161-67), Fick endeavored to prove that the entire translation was Chaucer's.

<sup>4</sup> The essay is reprinted in the Chaucer Society's volume, *Essays on Chaucer*, 439-51.

<sup>5</sup> *Englische Studien*, 11, 163-73 (1888). Lindner argued that the first 5810 lines were Chaucer's.

<sup>6</sup> Introduction to *Chaucer's Minor Poems*, first ed., 1888, xxiv, xxv.

authorship of the entire translation; Skeat admitted only Fragment A to the canon; and Professor Koch denied Chaucer's authorship of any of the poem. It is now generally agreed that Fragment A is certainly Chaucer's work, and many scholars accept Fragment C as well. It has been many years since anyone believed that Fragment B was from his pen.

It is not likely that many scholars will accept the following novel solution of the problem, recently put forward by Dr. Brusendorff: "The bibliographical facts about the *Romance of the Rose* would . . . appear to be as follows: originally composed in the Standard English of the late fourteenth century, it has only been preserved in a version, written down in the beginning of the fifteenth century by some person from the North Midlands, who had once learned the translation by heart, and who still knew its first 1800 lines or so almost perfectly; during the next 4000 lines, however, his memory constantly kept failing him, so that at last he had to break off abruptly and start again at an episode which occurred nearly 6000 lines further on in the translation, but which he remembered better, until after some 1900 lines he had to break off finally, still almost 10,000 lines from the end"<sup>1</sup>

In all probability, the translation of the *Roman de la Rose* which the God of Love attributed to Chaucer in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* never was completed. Nothing was more characteristic of the poet than to project vast works which he did not bring to completion, and it is extremely unlikely that he went through with the long task of translating the entire French poem. It is

<sup>1</sup> Aage Brusendorff: *The Chaucer Tradition*, 382. Chapter V of Dr. Brusendorff's book is entitled *The Romance of the Rose*.



the writer's opinion that only Fragment A can certainly be attributed to his workmanship, and it seems entirely natural to suppose that his work upon the translation terminated before he had completed 1800 lines.

Though Chaucer probably never finished his projected translation, it is evident that he had studied the French poem from beginning to end, and its influence upon his work can hardly be exaggerated. Literally hundreds of lines from the *Roman* appear in his own poetry, either in close translation or in paraphrase, and there is not one of his more significant works which does not bear the stamp of the influence of Guillaume de Lorris or Jean de Meun. He must have made the acquaintance of the *Roman* at an early age, when his mind was susceptible to impression and eager for suggestion. The very books which he read were those which the two French poets had read before him, and it is probable that the course of his reading was determined by suggestions which he found in the pages of the *Roman de la Rose*. The mediæval *clarté*, which French critics find in the highest degree in the work of Guillaume de Lorris, reveals its influence upon Chaucer's style throughout his whole career; and the satirical spirit of Jean de Meun contributed much to his most distinctive works. It may very well have been an early reading of the *Roman de la Rose* that first directed Chaucer's genius into the paths of poetry.\*

The relation which the Middle English translation bears to the French *Roman* (ed. Langlois) is shown by the following table:

\* The influence of the French poem upon Chaucer's works is fully discussed in D. S. Fansler's *Chaucer and the Roman de la Rose*.

Fragment A 1-1705	French text, 1-1670	Guillaume
Fragment B 1706-4432	French text 1671-4058	Guillaume
	4433-5810 French text 4059-5154	Jean
Fragment C 5811-7696	French text 10681-12360	Jean

An excellent translation of the entire French poem into modern English verse, by F. R. Ellis, included in the Temple Classics, has recently been reissued.

### "AN A. B. C."

(Thirteen Ms. copies extant)

**Authenticity:** Attributed to Chaucer by Lydgate and in four manuscripts, one by Shirley.

**Date:** Before 1370 (?).

**Source:** Guillaume de Deguilleville: *Pèlerinage de l'Ame*.

**Metrical form:** Eight-line stanza, riming *ababbcbc*.

Speght's 1602 Chaucer prefaces this poem with the following heading:

Chaucer's ABC, called *La Priere de Nostre Dame*: made, as some say, at the Request of Blanch, Duchesse of Lancaster, as a praier for her priuate vse, being a woman in her religion very deuout.

Setting aside this very dubious statement, which Skeat characterized as "probably a mere guess," we have no external evidence for dating the poem. It has usually been regarded as an early work, and Skeat hazarded a conjecture that it was Chaucer's "earliest extant complete poem." Professor Koch, on the other hand, is inclined to place the poem at the beginning of Chaucer's "second period,"

because of the use of the ten-syllable line and the freedom with which the original has been translated.\*

The *A. B. C.* is an adaptation of a prayer to the Blessed Virgin included in a long French poem, written by a Cistercian monk in the royal abbey of Chalis, Guillaume de Deguilleville, and entitled *Le Pèlerinage de l'Ame* (1330 or 1331). The first part of the work, in which the prayer is interpolated, is called *Le Pèlerinage de la Vie humaine*. The French text of the prayer is included in *The Oxford Chaucer* (I. 60, 261-271), and is printed in the Chaucer Society's One-Text Print of the Minor Poems.

Chaucer's adaptation of his original is decidedly free. Deguilleville wrote in octosyllabics, using a stanza of twelve lines built on two rimes, and Chaucer's change in the metrical form naturally made for freedom of treatment. In general, it may be said that each of his stanzas is an elaboration of a suggestion or two drawn from the French poem, with a few lines, usually at the beginning of the stanza, based rather more closely upon the original. His procedure is well illustrated in the stanza beginning

Noble princesse, that never haddest pere,

which is based upon the following lines in the French original :

Noble princesse du monde  
Qui n'as ne per ne seconde  
En royaume n'en empire,  
De toy vient, de toy redonde  
Tout le bien qui nous abonde,

\* *Anglia*, 3. 182, 183.

N'avons autre tirelire.  
En toy tout povre homme espire  
Et de toy son salu tire,  
Et en toy seule se fonde.  
Ne puet nul penser ne dire,  
Nul pourtraire ne escrire  
Ta bonté comme est parfonde.

One of the two extant English translations of the *Pèlerinage de la Vie humaine* is attributed to Lydgate. The manuscript in which it is contained leaves a blank for the insertion of Chaucer's translation of the prayer to the Virgin, which Lydgate introduces with these lines:

And touchynge the translacioun  
Off thys noble Orysoun,  
Whylom (yiff I shal nat feyne)  
The noble poete off Breteyne,  
My mayster Chaucer, in hys tyme,  
Aftter the Ffrenche he dyde yt ryme,  
Word by word, as in substaunce,  
Ryght as yt ys ymad in Fraunce,  
Fful devoutly, in sentence,  
In worshepe, and in reuerence  
Off that noble hevenly quene,  
Bothe moder and a mayde clene.

Five manuscripts of the other translation of the *Pèlerinage* include Chaucer's *A. B. C.* at the proper point.

The stanza form used in this poem appears again in *The Former Age*, *Lenvoy to Bukton*, and the *Monkes Tale*. It is also used, with repeated rimes, in *Fortune* and the *Balade to Rosemounde*.

## "COMPLEYNT UNTO PITE"

(Nine Ms. copies extant)

*Authenticity:* Attributed to Chaucer by Shirley.

*Date:* 1367-70?

*Source:* None has been discovered.

*Metrical form:* Rime-royal, a seven-line stanza riming  
*ababbcc*.

The *Compleynt unto Pite* cannot be dated with any certainty, but it may confidently be assigned to the earlier years of Chaucer's career as a poet. Furnivall believed that the poem was "the earliest original work of Chaucer."<sup>10</sup>

No source for the poem has been discovered, although Skeat believed that it would not be surprising "if a French poem of a similar character should one day be found." In view of the almost universal practice of personification, among mediæval poets, it is hardly necessary to seek any source for the central idea of the poem, and few will care to accept Skeat's opinion that the idea of personifying Pity came to Chaucer from Statius: *Thebaid* XI. 458-96. As Professor Lowes has pointed out, the "whole content of the *Compleynte* is leagues away from the grim and savage struggle in the *Thebaid*."<sup>11</sup>

It is probably unnecessary to warn the reader against accepting the *Compleynt unto Pite* as evidence that the poet had experienced unrequited love. Scholars are now agreed that Chaucer's references to the pangs of hopeless

<sup>10</sup> *Trial Forewords*, 31.

<sup>11</sup> *Modern Philology*, 14. 723. I am not able to follow Professor Lowes in finding in Chaucer's puzzling phrase, "Herenus quene," the "first of his responses to the influence of Dante."

love, in this poem and elsewhere, are conventional rather than autobiographical.<sup>12</sup>

The seven-line stanza, in which the *Compleynt* is written, was one of Chaucer's favorite metrical forms. So far as we know, this represents its earliest use in English poetry.

### "THE BOOK OF THE DUCHESSE"

(Three Ms. copies extant)

*Authenticity*· Mentioned in the Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women* and in the Prologue to the Man of Law's Tale. Attributed to Chaucer by Lydgate: *Prologue to the Falls of Princes*.

*Date*· 1369-70

*Sources* Part of the Proem based on Ovid: *Metamorphoses* (XI. 410-748), and on Guillaume de Machaut. *Dir de la Fontaine Amoreuse* (542-698). Many details from other sources.

*Metrical form* Octosyllabics.

*The Book of the Duchesse* is the earliest of Chaucer's works to which a date can be assigned with any certainty. It was written as an elegy upon the death of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, who died September 12, 1369, and it was probably completed within a few months after her death.<sup>13</sup> Her husband, John of Gaunt, remarried in 1372.

<sup>12</sup> The autobiographical interpretation of the poem is presented by Furnivall. *Trial Forewords*, 35, ff. It is contested by Lounsbury *Studies*, I 221, ff., and by Sypherd in *Mod. Lang. Notes*, 20. 240-43.

<sup>13</sup> The reader should not overlook the covert allusions to the name of Blanche in line 948, and to the titles of John of Gaunt, Earl of Richmond and Duke of Lancaster, in lines 1318, 1319.

The story of Ceyx and Alcyone is told by Ovid and by Guillaume de Machaut, in the passages indicated above. It has been demonstrated that Chaucer was familiar with both these versions of the story, but it is clear that Ovid was his principal source for this part of his poem. The reader may be interested in comparing Chaucer's description of the House of Sleep with Dryden's translation of the Latin original, which is given below :

Near the Cimmerians, in his dark abode,  
Deep in a cavern dwells the drowsy god,  
Whose gloomy mansion nor the rising sun,  
Nor setting, visits, nor the lightsome noon;  
But lazy vapours round the region fly,  
Perpetual twilight, and a doubtful sky;  
No crowing cock does there his wings display,  
Nor with his horny bill provoke the day,  
Nor watchful dogs, nor the more wakeful geese,  
Disturb with nightly noise the sacred peace,  
Nor beasts of nature, nor the tame are nigh,  
Nor trees with tempests rock'd, nor human cry,  
But safe repose, without an air of breath,  
Dwells here, and a dumb quiet next to death.

An arm of Lethe, with a gentle flow  
Arising upward from the rock below,  
The palace moats, and o'er the pebbles creeps,  
And with soft murmurs calls the coming sleeps.  
Around its entry nodding poppies grow,  
And all cool simples that sweet rest bestow;  
Night from the plants their sleepy virtue drains,  
And, passing, sheds it on the silent plains.  
No door there was, the unguarded house to keep,  
On creaking hinges turn'd, to break his sleep.

But in the gloomy court was raised a bed,

Stuff'd with black plumes, and on an ebon 'sted;  
Black was the covering too, where lay the god,  
And slept supine, his limbs display'd abroad;  
About his head fantastic visions fly,  
Which various images of things supply,  
And mock their forms, the leaves on trees not more,  
Nor bearded ears in fields, nor sands upon the shore.

Many passages borrowed from the works of Guillaume de Machaut have been pointed out in the body of the poem. Professor Kittredge has shown that Chaucer has drawn especially upon the *Jugement du Roy de Behaingne* and used the *Remede de Fortune*, the *Dit du Vergier*, and several of Machaut's minor works. The description of the hunt and of the walk through the forest, in fact, furnish the only extensive portion of the *Book of the Duchesse* which does not betray close imitation of Machaut or of some other French poet.<sup>14</sup> The opening lines of the Proem bear a resemblance to some lines in Froissart's *Paradys d'Amour* and may well have been derived from that source, since "Eclympasteyre, that was the god of slepes heyre," certainly reached Chaucer through Froissart's poem.<sup>15</sup> The machinery of the elegy—the dream, the ideal landscape, the singing birds, the veiled hint that the author himself is languishing in hopeless love—indicates clearly that Chaucer was at the time very much under the influence of the

<sup>14</sup> *Publ. Mod. Lang. Assn.*, 30. 1-24. Professor Kittredge's study supersedes the work of Sandras (*Étude sur G. Chaucer*, 89-95).

<sup>15</sup> We do not know where Froissart found his "Enclimpostair." The priority of Froissart's poem to Chaucer's has been put beyond question by Professor Kittredge, in an article published in *Englische Studien*, 26. 321-36.



French poetry of courtly love, and it is not surprising to find in the poem so many verbal echoes from Froissart and Guillaume de Machaut. Even less surprising are the many borrowings from the *Roman de la Rose*, which exerted an influence upon nearly everything that Chaucer wrote.

None of these works, of course, may be regarded as the "source" of the *Book of the Duchesse*. The structure of the poem as a whole was probably original with Chaucer. It has been suggested that even here he was indebted to a French poem of the school of courtly love, an anonymous work of the fourteenth century entitled *Le Songe Vert*; but the similarity in structure between the two poems seems to be due rather to the conventions of the type, in which both poets were writing, than to direct borrowing.<sup>16</sup>

Professor Lowes's discovery of the "drye see" and of "the Carrenare" (lines 1028, 1029) is not of the first importance, but the work has been done so vivaciously and with so much of the true scholar's zeal that his article should certainly not pass without comment. It is to be found in *Modern Philology*, 3. 1-46.

The Man of Law, in the *Canterbury Tales*, says of Chaucer that

"In youthe he made of Ceys and Alcion."

It may be that this line merely presents an alternative title for *The Book of the Duchesse*, but it has been taken as evidence that the portion of the poem which tells the story

<sup>16</sup> Cf. W. Owen Sypherd: *Le Songe Vert and Chaucer's Dream Poems*, in *Mod. Lang. Notes*, 24. 46-47.

of Ceyx and Alcyone was written as an independent work and was later incorporated in the elegy upon the death of the Duchess Blanche.

The octosyllabic verse, in which the poem is written, had been in use in England for a full century. Such well known poems as *Havelok the Dane* (1270-1280), Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* (1303), and Richard of Hampole's *Pricke of Conscience* (ca. 1330-1340) were written in this metrical form. Chaucer used the same form later in *The Hous of Fame*, but the earlier poem exhibits far more irregularities, such as the substitution of trochees, the introduction of an extra syllable before the caesura, the violent slurring of syllables, and the appearance of hiatus where elision would be expected. On the other hand, the *Hous of Fame* shows a higher percentage of lines with only one syllable in the first foot.<sup>17</sup> This irregularity is common in Chaucer's verse, and it is safe to say that he did not regard it as an artistic blemish.

### "THE COMPLEYNT OF MARS"

(Eight Ms. copies extant)

*Authenticity:* Ascribed to Chaucer by Shirley and Lydgate.

*Date:* ca. 1374.

*Source:* None has been found.

*Metrical form:* Rime-royal, and a nine-line stanza, riming  
aabaabbcc.

By means of astronomical computation, based on data furnished by the poem, attempts have been made to assign

<sup>17</sup> These statements are based largely upon a study by E. F. Shannon, published in the *Journ. Eng. and Germ. Philology*, 12, 277-94.

the *Compleynt of Mars* definitely to the year 1379, when Mars and Venus were in conjunction on April 14.<sup>18</sup> For a method which aims at precise accuracy, this result is hardly satisfactory, since Chaucer makes it clear, in line 139, that the conjunction which he is describing took place on April 12. Most people of sense will probably agree with Professor Manly that "to draw from the astronomical data any inference as to the year in which the poem was composed would be, to say the least, hazardous."<sup>19</sup>

Equally hazardous is the attempt to date the poem by reference to court scandal, since the evidence that the *Compleynt* rests upon any such basis is not very trustworthy. The poem appears to be nothing more than an ingenious astronomical allegory, used to diversify a highly conventional theme, very similar to that of the typical "aube" or "tagelied."<sup>20</sup> There is every reason to assign it to a fairly early date in Chaucer's poetical career.

Chaucer's acquaintance with the amours of Mars and Venus was doubtless derived from Ovid: *Metamorphoses*, IV. 170-89; but the Latin text certainly cannot be called a source of the poem. The Brooch of Thebes appears in Statius; *Thebaid*, II. 265-98.

Shirley, the fifteenth-century compiler and copyist, appends the following note to his copy of the *Compleynt* in a manuscript preserved in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge:

Thus eondethe here this complaint whiche some men sayne was made by (i. e., about) my lady of York doughter to the

<sup>18</sup> Cf. John Koch, in *Anglia*, 9. 582-84, and in his *Chronology*, 30-33.

<sup>19</sup> *Harvard Studies*, V. 113.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. C. R. Baskerville: *English Songs of the Night Visit*, in *Publ. Mod. Lang. Assn.*, 36. 565-614.

kyng of Spaygne and my lord of Huntyngdoun some tyme  
duc of Excestre . . .

In the same manuscript, Shirley introduces the poem as follows:

Loo yee louers gladethe and comfortethe you of thallyance  
entrayted bytwene the hardy and furyous Mars the god of  
armes and Venus the double (i. e., fickle) goddesse of loue  
made by Geffrey Chaucier at the comandement of the re-  
nomed and excellent Prynce my lord the Duc Iohn of Lan-  
castre.

"My lady of York" was the Princess Isabel, daughter of King Pedro of Castile, and sister to the Spanish princess who was John of Gaunt's second wife. Isabel came to England in 1372 and was married to John of Gaunt's brother, Edmund, later Duke of York. "My lord of Huntyngdoun" was King Richard's half-brother John Holland, later Duke of Exeter. That John of Gaunt should have commanded Chaucer to celebrate a scandalous intrigue between his sister-in-law and the king's brother is a fantastic notion, which probably found its way into Shirley's manuscript through unfounded gossip or through the copyist's own ingenious imagination.<sup>21</sup>

#### "THE PARLEMENT OF FOULES"

(Fourteen Ms. copies extant)

*Authenticity:* Mentioned by Chaucer in the 'Retractation' and in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. Ascribed

<sup>21</sup> S. H. Cowling (*Rev. Eng. Studies*, 2, 405-10) believes the *Compleynt of Mars* celebrates the amour of John Holland and Elizabeth, countess of Pembroke, the daughter of John of Gaunt and the Duchess Blanche. He would date the poem in 1385.

to Chaucer by Lydgate in the Prologue to the *Falls of Princes*, Bk. I, ascribed to Chaucer in three of the Mss.

*Date*: 1381-2. But cf. Braddy: *Three Chaucer Studies*, II.

*Source*: No definite source for the poem as a whole. Details from various sources.

*Metrical form*: Rime-royal.

In 1877, Dr. Koch suggested that the *Parlement of Foules* was an allegory, written to celebrate the betrothal of Richard II and Princess Anne of Bohemia, daughter of the Emperor Charles IV. According to his interpretation of the poem, the "formel" represents Anne, the "royal tercel" who is the first to speak represents King Richard, and the other two contestants are earlier suitors of Anne, William of Bavaria and Frederick of Meissen.<sup>22</sup> It has more recently been suggested that the three suitors were Frederick of Meissen, Charles VI of France, and Richard of England.<sup>23</sup> If we are correct in assuming a connection between the *Parlement of Foules* and the betrothal of King Richard to the Princess Anne, we can date the poem fairly accurately. The marriage of the royal pair took place in January, 1382.

It is to be said, however, that this interpretation of the poem has been vigorously attacked. Professor Rickert accepts the theory that the poem is an allegory, based upon a contemplated marriage in the royal family; but she argues that the lady involved is more likely to have been Philippa of Lancaster, John of Gaunt's daughter, whom the Duke, according to Froissart, wished to marry to his nephew, King Richard. The other suitors, according to

<sup>22</sup> *Englische Studien*, I. 287-89.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. O. F. Emerson in *Modern Philology*, 8. 45-62. Cf. *Mod. Lang. Notes*, 26. 8-12, 109-11.

Miss Rickert's interpretation, were William of Hainaut and John of Blois.<sup>24</sup> Dr. Haldeen Braddy would date the poem in April, 1377, when negotiations, in which Chaucer was himself engaged, were going on for the betrothal of Prince Richard to Princess Marie, daughter of Charles V of France. Professor Manly rejected entirely the allegorical interpretation of the poem, which he regards as an example of the conventional *demandes d'amour*, written to celebrate love on Saint Valentine's day.<sup>25</sup>

The account of the parliament of birds is undoubtedly original with Chaucer, although similar assemblies are described by other mediæval poets. Chaucer's poem certainly owes nothing, unless it be its title, to the fable of Marie de France called "Li Parlemens des Oiseax por faire Roi."

Nevertheless, the poem contains much borrowed material in its other portions. In lines 36-84, Chaucer gives us a synopsis of Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, which reached him through the commentary of Macrobius. The original has, of course, been much compressed; but the synopsis gives a very adequate notion of the ideas presented in Cicero's work, and Chaucer has been able, as well, to reproduce some of the actual phraseology and imagery of his original.<sup>26</sup>

In the two lines immediately following the synopsis of

<sup>24</sup> *A New Interpretation of the "Parlement of Foules," Modern Philology*, 18. 1-29.

<sup>25</sup> *What is the Parlement of Foules?* Festschrift für Lorenz Morsbach, 279-90. Answered by Emerson in *Journ. Eng. and Germ. Philology*, 13. 566-82.

<sup>26</sup> A full translation of Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* is included in Lounsbury's edition of the *Parlement of Foules*, 11-16.

the *Somnium Scipionis*, readers of Dante will recognize the lines which open the second canto of the *Inferno*:

Now was the day departing, and the air,  
Imbrow'n'd with shadows, from their toils released  
All animals on earth.

The inscriptions over the gates will also suggest to every reader the characters which Dante saw

Over a portal's lofty arch inscribed.<sup>27</sup>

The stanza beginning at line 99 is a close imitation of the following lines from Claudian: *In Sextum Consulatium Honorii Augusti Proæfatio*, 3-10:

The huntsman stretches his weary limbs upon the couch, yet his mind ever returns to the woods where his quarry lurks. The judge dreams of law-suits, the charioteer of his chariot, the nightly steeds of which he guides past a shadowy turning-point. The lover repeats love's mysteries, the merchant makes exchange of goods, the miser still watchfully grasps at elusive riches, and to thirsty sufferers all-pervading sleep offers from a cooling spring idly alluring draughts.<sup>28</sup>

Sixteen stanzas of the poem, beginning at line 183, are imitated from stanzas in the seventh book of Boccaccio's *Teseida*. The Italian text, together with a literal translation by W. M. Rossetti, is printed by Skeat (I. 68-73). I reproduce below three stanzas from the translation, containing a part of the description of the Temple of Venus, which Chaucer, as it will be seen, follows very closely:

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Inferno*, III. 1, ff.

<sup>28</sup> Trans. by M. Platnauer, Bohn Lib. (1922), II. 71.

In mid the place, on lofty columns,  
She saw a temple of copper; round which  
She saw youths dancing and women—  
This one of them beautiful, and that one in fine raiment,  
Ungirdled, barefoot, only in their hair and gowns,  
Who spent the day in this alone.  
Then over the temple she saw doves hover  
And settle and coo.

And near to the entry of the temple  
She saw that there sat quietly  
My lady Peace, who a curtain  
Moved lightly before the door.  
Next her, very subdued in aspect,  
Sat Patience discreetly,  
Pallid in look, and on all sides  
Around her she saw artful Promises.

Then entering the temple, of Sighs  
She felt there an earthquake, which whirled  
All fiery with hot desires.  
This lit up all the altars  
With new flames born of pangs;  
Each of which dripped with tears  
Produced by a woman cruel and fell  
Whom she there saw, called Jealousy.

In his treatment of the material borrowed from the *Teseida*, Chaucer shows characteristic independence. He rearranges the order of the stanzas,<sup>29</sup> suppresses some details, and adds others. Particularly interesting is the fact that he supplements Boccaccio's list of famous lovers by add-

<sup>29</sup> Lines 183-259 correspond to the *Teseida*, VII. St. 51-60; lines 260-80, to St. 63-66, and lines 281-94, to St. 61, 62.



ing the names of those whom Dante sees in the circle of carnal sinners (*Inferno* V).<sup>80</sup>

The description of the birds which flock about the Goddess Nature is borrowed in large measure from the *De Planctu Naturae* of Alanus de Insulis, a twelfth-century poet, whom Chaucer himself mentions as the source of his description of the goddess (lines 316-18). In the Latin work, however, the birds were represented as part of the embroidery upon the goddess's robe.<sup>81</sup> It is possible that some of the epithets, used to characterize the trees which Chaucer mentions in lines 176-82, were derived from a similar list in Joseph of Exeter's paraphrase of the history of the fall of Troy ascribed to "Dares Phrygius."<sup>82</sup>

#### "COMPLEINT TO HIS LADY"

(Two Ms. copies extant)

**Authenticity:** Ascribed to Chaucer in one of the Ms. Apparently regarded as Chaucer's by Shirley, who copies this poem and the *Compleynt unto Pite* under one running title.

**Date:** 1374, or soon after.

**Source:** No direct source is known.

**Metrical Form:** Part I: Rime-Royal; Part II: *Terza rima*; Part III: Ten-line stanza, riming *aabaabccddc* (second stanza imperfect).

<sup>80</sup> Cf. J. L. Lowes, *Chaucer and Dante*, in *Modern Philology*, 14, 705-35.

<sup>81</sup> An English translation of the *De Planctu Naturae*, by D. M. Moffat; has been published in the *Yale Studies in English*, XXXVI.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. R. K. Root: *Chaucer's Dares*, in *Modern Philology*, 15, 18-22.

The use of *terza rima*, which appears for the first time in English poetry in this poem, dates the *Compleint* after Chaucer's first Italian journey (1372-3). As early a date as possible should be assigned to the poem, which is merely a series of experiments in metrical forms, based upon the most conventional of subjects and very much in the manner of such poets as Guillaume de Machaut, whose influence upon Chaucer waned as he grew better acquainted with Italian literature.

A number of lines from this poem found their way later into the *Anelida and Arcite*, one of them exactly as it stands here and others in slightly altered form.

"ANELIDA AND ARCITE"

(The entire poem extant in eight Mss.,  
the "Compleynt" alone in four others)

*Authenticity*: Ascribed to Chaucer in three Mss., two of them Shirley's. Mentioned among Chaucer's works by Lydgate in the Prologue to the *Falls of Princes*, Book I.

*Date*: ca. 1380?

*Sources*: Lines 1-21 based upon Boccaccio's *Teseida*, I. St. 1-3, in reverse order; lines 50-70, upon the same work, II. St. 10-12. Lines 22-46 based upon Statius: *Thebaid*, XII. 519, ff. For the rest of the poem, no source has been discovered.

*Metrical form*: Rime-royal, except for the "Compleynt," which is discussed below.

The *Anelida and Arcite* is in itself a poem of slight importance, save as it furnishes a very striking example

of Chaucer's interest in metrical experimentation; but it has attracted the attention of scholars because it is curiously connected with one of the poet's most important works. Not only does the "fals Arcite" bear the same name as one of the heroes of the *Knichtes Tale*, but several stanzas of the *Anelida and Arcite* are derived from the very source from which the story of Palamon and Arcite was taken. The poem breaks off, moreover, upon a promise of just such a description of the Temple of Mars as that which is included in the Knight's Tale.

Stanzas in rime-royal, based upon Boccaccio's *Teseida*, are to be found, not only in this poem, but also in the *Parlement of Foules* and in the *Troilus*. This fact has been used as a foundation for an interesting theory that Chaucer originally projected a translation of the Italian poem in the seven-line stanza. It has even been conjectured that this translation was completed and was the work referred to as "the love of Palamon and Arcyte" in the Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women* (B 420, 421). That Chaucer actually completed any other version of the story of Palamon and Arcite than that which is known to us as the *Knichtes Tale* is extremely unlikely, and the theory of an earlier form of that work has now been abandoned. It is clear, however, that the poet had been working over the *Teseida* before the *Knichtes Tale* was attempted, and the *Anelida and Arcite* probably represents his first attempt to utilize material from Boccaccio's epic poem. The task must have been undertaken soon after his second Italian journey, at a time when he was still trying to cramp his genius within the conventions of the poets of fourteenth-century France. It was abandoned, it seems to me, be-

cause it soon became evident that such diverse material would not blend. At a later time, thoroughly emancipated from the barren notion that every poem must be built around a lover's 'complaint,' Chaucer returned to the *Teseida* and wrote his story of the loves of Palamon and Arcite, which he still later inserted in the *Canterbury Tales*, as the story told by the Knight. A few lines from the *Anelida and Arcite*, altered very slightly, found their way into the later work. Since his attention had been rather closely given to the *Teseida*, at the time when he projected the *Anelida and Arcite*, it is not strange that stanzas from the Italian poem should appear in other works of Chaucer belonging to the same period.<sup>33</sup>

We do not know why Chaucer chose to use the name of Arcite for a false lover in this poem, nor where he found Anelida, "the quene of Ermony." Henry Bradshaw believed that "Anelida" reached Chaucer through a misspelling, in some Latin manuscript, of the name of Anahita, a goddess of Persia and Armenia.<sup>34</sup> It is more probable that he found the name in some old romance.

Professor Tupper's identification of Arcite with the Earl of Ormonde, whose mother was a d'Arcy, and of Anelida with his countess, whose maiden name was Anne Welle, has not gained acceptance.<sup>35</sup> It is true that "Ormonde" was sometimes spelled "Ermonia," in contemporary Latin documents, and that names are to be found for

<sup>33</sup> This view coincides, in general, with that presented by Professor Lowes in *Publ. Mod. Lang. Assn.*, 20. 860, ff.

<sup>34</sup> E. B. Cowell: *Chaucer Essays*, 617-21. But cf. Schick's edition of the *Temple of Glas*, E. E. T. S., Ext. Ser. LX. cxx.

<sup>35</sup> *Chaucer's Tale of Ireland*, in *Publ. Mod. Lang. Assn.*, 36. 186-222.

the count and countess which can be metamorphosed into Anelida and Arcite without great difficulty; but the only evidence that their marriage was not a happy one lies in the existence of two illegitimate children of the earl, and they may very well have been born some years before his marriage to Anne Welle.

Another problem, for which no satisfactory solution has yet been offered, is presented by the mysterious "Corinne," whom Chaucer mentions, in line 21, as one of his authorities. It is possible that he derived the name from "Corinna," a title sometimes given, in mediæval manuscripts, to the *Amores* of Ovid; but there is certainly no evidence that the *Anelida* owes anything to the *Amores*.<sup>86</sup>

The metrical structure of the poem presents some very unusual features. In Stanza 5 of Strophe and Antistrophe, in the "Compleynt," we encounter a four-stress line, which Chaucer does not elsewhere employ in stanza-form, except in the burlesque *Sir Thopas*. Even here, it will be noticed, every fourth line contains five stresses. These two stanzas also afford the only example of Chaucer's use of a rime-scheme modeled on the French *virelai*. Following the pattern of the *virelai*, the two rimes, which are employed in the first eight lines of the stanza, appear in the last eight lines in reverse order; viz., *aaabaaab bbbabbbba*.<sup>86a</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Cf. E. F. Shannon: *Source of Chaucer's Anelida and Arcite*, in *Publ. Mod. Lang. Assn.*, 27. 461-85, and his *Chaucer and the Roman Poets*, 15, ff.

<sup>86a</sup> The rest of the "compleynt" is in nine-line stanzas, riming *aabaabbab*. Stanza 6, in Strophe and Antistrophe, employs internal rime, one of the "colours" taught by mediæval rhetoricians. Cf. E. P. Hammond: *English Verse between Chaucer and Surrey*, 466, 467.

**"CHAUCERS WORDES UNTO ADAM"**

(One Ms. copy extant)

*Authenticity:* Ascribed to Chaucer in the Ms., which is Shirley's.

*Date:* 1386?

*Source:* None need be sought.

*Metrical form:* Rime-royal.

The mention of the *Troilus* and of the translation of Boethius is convincing evidence that this stanza was written shortly after the completion of those works, both of which, in all probability, belong to the years between 1380 and 1385.

**"THE FORMER AGE"**

(Two Ms. copies extant)

*Authenticity:* Ascribed to Chaucer in both Mss.

*Date:* ca. 1389?

*Source:* Boethius: *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, Bk. II.  
Met. 5.

*Metrical Form:* Eight-line stanza, riming *ababbcbc*.

We have no means of knowing whether this poem and two others based upon Boethius were written before or after Chaucer's prose translation of the *Consolation of Philosophy*. It seems more probable that they belong to a late period in the poet's career. Only the first four stanzas are based upon Boethius, and we know of no certain source for the rest of the poem.

## "FORTUNE"

(Ten Ms. copies extant)

**Authenticity:** Ascribed to Chaucer in four Mss., two of them Shirley's.

**Date:** ca. 1389?

**Source:** Based on Boethius: *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, Bk. II. Pr. 1, 2, 3, 4, 8.

**Metrical Form:** Three *balades* with an envoy. Each *balade* has three stanzas of eight lines, riming *ababbcb*. The envoy has seven lines, riming *ababbab*. Only ten rimes are used in the entire poem.

Henry Bradshaw was the first to trace the ideas in this poem to their source in Boethius.<sup>87</sup> It is also apparent that the poem owes something to a passage in the *Roman de la Rose* (Mid. Eng. trans., 5403-5578), in which Jean de Meun discusses the benefits which evil fortune confers upon a man, in unmasking false friends. The heading "Balades de vilage (i. e., visage) saunz peynture," which appears in some of the manuscripts, has reference to this benefit of evil fortune.

There is little profit in searching Chaucer's career for some particularly severe reversal of fortune, in an attempt to date this poem; for it is not likely that these well-turned *balades* represent the fruit of bitter experience. A poet suffering under grave misfortune might arm himself with the philosophy of Boethius and argue his case with as great a show of equanimity as this poem affords; but he could hardly achieve sufficient detachment to be so deft, either with his rimes or with his hints. The poem remains,

<sup>87</sup> G. W. Prothero: *Memoir of Henry Bradshaw* (1888), 212.

in general, on a lofty philosophic plane, but it is not without some mundane touches, which strongly suggest the complaint which Chaucer addressed to his empty purse. The envoy makes it clear that we have here just such another graceful petition for royal favor. Attempts to identify the "beste frend," referred to in the refrain of the second *balade*, or the princes addressed in the envoy, have been called idle; but it is the fact that in 1389, or thereabouts, when circumstances made it desirable for Chaucer to secure employment under the Crown, there were sons of Edward III, still living, "three or tweyne"; and Richard the king, on more than one previous occasion, had shown himself Chaucer's "beste frend" in very substantial ways.<sup>28</sup>

### "MERCILES BEAUTE"

(Only one Ms. copy extant)

*Authenticity:* Doubtful.

*Date:* 1390-93?

*Source:* Probably derived from French sources.

*Metrical Form:* Three roundels. The roundel has thirteen lines, riming *abbabababbabb*. The first three lines form a refrain, appearing again at the end; and the first two lines of this refrain are repeated in the middle of the roundel, at lines six and seven.

<sup>28</sup> J. B. Bilderbeck (*Athenæum*, 1902, I. 82, 83) points out that an Order in Council, on March 8, 1390, forbade all royal gifts and grants without the advice of the Council and the assent of the Dukes of Guienne (John of Gaunt), of York, and of Gloucester, or of two of them. He argues that the envoy was addressed "half in earnest, half in game" to the Privy Council, at a time when the poet's fortunes needed mending.



This poem, first attributed to Chaucer by Bishop Percy, has been admitted to the canon purely on its own merits, without the support of external evidence.<sup>39</sup> It is to be said, however, that it occurs in a manuscript containing authentic works of Chaucer.

Skeat found a resemblance between these roundels and one by a thirteenth-century French writer, Willamme d'Amiens, but the connection seems tenuous, to say the least. More striking is the similarity, pointed out by Professor Lowes, between *Merciles Beaute* and some poems by Deschamps, an author with whose works Chaucer is known to have been familiar.<sup>40</sup> The audacious line with which the third roundel begins is identical with the first line of the *reponse* of the Duc de Berry to the author of the *Cent Ballades* (1389?):

Puiz qu'a Amours suis si gras eschapé.<sup>41</sup>

The tone of the poem suggests a date approximating that of the playful *Envoy to Bukton*.

"TO ROSEMOUNDE"

(Only one Ms. copy extant)

*Authenticity:* Ascribed to Chaucer in the manuscript.

*Date:* 1390-93?

*Source:* None has been found.

*Metrical Form:* A *balade* in three eight-line stanzas, riming on three rimes throughout: *ababbcbc*.

<sup>39</sup> The editors of the *Globe Chaucer* do not include the poem.

<sup>40</sup> *Mod. Lang. Rev.*, 5. 33-39.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. W. L. Renwick: *Chaucer's Triple Roundel 'Merciles Beaute,'* in *Mod. Lang. Rev.*, 16. 322, 323.

The *Balade to Rosemounde* was discovered by Skeat, in 1891, on a fly-leaf of a manuscript in the Bodleian. Like the copy of the *Troilus* in the same manuscript, it bears at the end the two words "Tregentil" and "Chaucer." Skeat believed that "Tregentil" represented the name of the scribe.

This poem, like the *Mercilcs Beaute*, must belong to a period when Chaucer had become thoroughly emancipated from the school of love-poetry represented by his more conventional "compleynts."

### "TRUTH"

(Twenty-two Ms. copies extant)

*Authenticity:* Ascribed to Chaucer in six Mss.

*Date:* 1386-90?

*Source:* Possibly based on Boethius.

*Metrical Form:* A *balade* of three stanzas and an envoy, each of seven lines, riming throughout on three rimes: *abab-bcc*.

Scholars long ago relinquished the sentimental tradition, started by Shirley, that this *balade* of Chaucer was "made on his deeth bedde." A discovery by Professor Rickert makes the tradition even more untenable. She has found, in Sir Philip la Vache, son-in-law to Chaucer's friend, Sir Lewis Clifford, the very person addressed, in the first line of the envoy, as "thou vache."<sup>42</sup> Since the envoy appears in only one manuscript copy of the poem, it is not entirely certain that this "Balade de bon conseil" was

<sup>42</sup> Edith Rickert: *Thou Vache*, in *Modern Philology*, 11. 209-25.

set down solely for the edification of Sir Philip, and it may be that the last stanza was a later addition by the poet.<sup>43</sup> To classify the *balade*, therefore, with the personal epistles to Scogan and to Bukton is not quite safe; but Miss Rickert's discovery has definitely removed the poem from the dubious company of death-bed utterances.

Like so much of Chaucer's more serious work, the *balade* shows evidence of the influence of Boethius. Dr. Koch finds a possible source in the *Consolation of Philosophy*, Book III. Met. 11, but the resemblances which he points out are very slight. Skeat felt sure that the third stanza of the *balade* was based upon Book I. Pr. 5 in Boethius.<sup>44</sup>

#### "GENTILESSE"

(Nine Ms. copies extant)

*Authenticity*: Ascribed to Chaucer by Scogan and by Shirley.

*Date*: 1390-95?

*Sources*: Boethius: *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, Bk. III. Pr. 6 and Met. 6. Also *Roman de la Rose*, 18,607, ff.

*Metrical Form*: Three seven-line stanzas, riming on three rimes throughout: *ababbcc*.

The ideas expressed in this poem are to be encountered frequently in mediæval literature. It is probable that they reached Chaucer through the passages in Boethius and Jean de Meun indicated above. He was to return to

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Koch. *Anglia*, 46. 47-48. Dr. Brusendorff (*The Chaucer Tradition*, 246-50) denies that Chaucer wrote the envoy.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Oxford Chaucer*, I. 550-52.

the subject in the tale told by the Wyf of Bath (*Cant. Tales*, D 1109-76).

In one of the manuscripts, Chaucer's poem is inserted in a "Moral Balade," which, according to Shirley, was addressed "to my lorde the Prince, to my lord of Clarence, to my lord of Bedford and to my lorde of Gloucestre, by Henry Scogan, at a souper of feorthe merchande in the vyntre in london at the hous of Lowys Iohan." Henry Scogan was undoubtedly the person addressed by Chaucer in the famous *Envoy*, and the princes named by Shirley were the four sons of Henry IV. In introducing the *Gentillesse* into his "Moral balade," Scogan refers to

My maistre Chaucier, God his soule have,  
That in his langage was so curyous.

#### "LAK OF STEDFASTNESSE"

(Twelve Ms. copies extant)

*Authenticity:* Ascribed to Chaucer by Shirley.

*Date:* 1386-89?

*Source:* None has been discovered.

*Metrical Form* Three stanzas and an envoy, in rime-royal, using only three rimes throughout.

One of the manuscripts, sometimes attributed to Shirley, says of this *balade* that it was made by "Geoffrey Chaunciers the Laureall Poete of Albion" and that it was sent "to his souerain lorde kynge Richarde the secounde thane being in his Castell of Windesore." Another manuscript calls the poem a "Balade Royale made by oure Laureal poete of Albyon in hees laste yeeres." On this

evidence, the poem has usually been assigned to the latter years of Richard's reign (i. e., 1397-99), when dissension, oppression, and covetousness were certainly rife in the land, under the king's feeble and corrupt government. It has been argued, however, that the poem might have given umbrage to the king, if addressed to him at a time when his misgovernment was notorious. According to this view, so proficient a courtier as Chaucer would have been more likely to address such a poem as this to his monarch at a period when the government of the land was in the hands of his none too popular uncles, and when the people were known to be looking to the young king to assert himself and put an end to corruption. If this reasoning is correct, the poem should be assigned to the years 1386-89.

Skeat's suggestion that the *Balade* was based upon Boethius, Book II, Met. 8, seems unnecessary.

### "LENVOY DE CHAUCER A SCOGAN"

(Three Ms. copies extant)

*Authenticity:* Ascribed to Chaucer in all three Mss.

*Date:* 1393?

*Source:* None need be sought.

*Metrical Form:* Six stanzas and an envoy, in rime-royal, with different rimes in each stanza.

From the references to the "deluge of pestilence," which the poet attributes to the tears of Venus, the *Envoy to Scogan* has been dated in 1393, when there was an unusually heavy autumn rainfall. Allusions to advancing years and a rounding figure make a date as late as 1393

appear correct. At that time, Chaucer was in all probability residing at Greenwich. From his situation, far down the Thames from Windsor Castle, he writes his friend, who was undoubtedly living at the court, to use his influence to secure favors for the poet.<sup>45</sup>

The friend to whom the epistle is addressed was probably the same Henry Scogan who later incorporated Chaucer's *balade of Gentilesse* in the "moral balades" which he addressed to the four sons of Henry IV. By his own account, he was at that time "fader" (tutor) to these four princes; but what position he held at the court of Richard II has not been ascertained.

#### "LENGVOY DE CHAUCER A BUKTON"

(Only one Ms. copy extant)

*Authenticity:* Marked as Chaucer's in the Ms.

*Date:* 1393-96.

*Source:* None need be sought.

*Metrical Form:* Three stanzas and an envoy, of eight lines each, riming *ababbcbc*, on different rimes in each stanza.

In August, 1396, William of Hainaut, led an expedition into Friesland. According to Froissart, "some men-at-arms and two hundred archers, under the command of three English lords," were sent from England, by Richard

<sup>45</sup> Such is the usual interpretation of lines 43-46, based on marginal notes in the manuscripts. Professor Manly suggests that these notes may belong to a much later period, and that Chaucer may be referring to a sojourn in Somersetshire, in connection with his duties as sub-forester of Petherton Park. *Some New Light on Chaucer*, 38-41.

II, to take part in the expedition. This circumstance has been used to date the *Envoy to Bukton*, on the ground that an allusion to the dangers of being taken prisoner "in Fryse" must have been suggested by this expedition. "The Frieslanders," Froissart tells us, "offered their prisoners in exchange, man for man, but, when their enemies had none to give in return, they put them to death." It has recently been pointed out, by Professor Lowes, that earlier expeditions into Friesland have been recorded, and that an allusion to the perils of being taken prisoner there would have been well understood as early as 1393, and would have been more effective at the time when the expedition of 1396 was being organized than after reports of its success had begun to come in.<sup>46</sup>

Although some scholars argue that "my maister Bukton" was a certain Robert Bukton of Suffolk, it is more generally believed that the poem was addressed to Sir Peter de Buketon, who was King's Escheator for the County of York in 1397. "Peter Bukton came from a community not unknown to the poet as well as to a considerable body of Londoners; . . . he too like Chaucer and his circle was in the Lancashire retinue, and an intimate friend and favorite of Henry, the Earl of Derby (Henry IV); and . . . consequently in view of this close tie between the Earl and the Yorkshireman the Frisian reference is more appropriate to Sir Peter the crusader than to the (seemingly) unadventurous Robert."<sup>47</sup>

<sup>46</sup> J. L. Lowes: *The Date of the Envoy to Bukton* in *Mod. Lang. Notes* 27. 45-48.

<sup>47</sup> E. P. Kuhl: *Chaucer's My Maister Bukton* in *Publ. Mod. Lang. Assn.*, 38. 115-31.

"THE COMPLEYNT OF VENUS"

(Eight Ms. copies extant)

*Authenticity:* Ascribed to Chaucer by Shirley.

*Date:* 1391-94.

*Source:* Three *balades* of Oton de Granson.

*Metrical Form:* Three *balades* and an envoy. Each *balade* has three eight-line stanzas, riming *ababbccb*, on three rimes throughout. Envoy: a ten-line stanza, riming *aabaabbaab*.

In Shirley's Ashmole manuscript, this poem is headed:

Here begynneth a balade made by that worthy  
Knight of Savoye in frenshe calde Sir Otes  
Graunson, translated by Chauciers.

Granson, whom Shirley correctly describes as a knight of Savoy, had taken an oath of allegiance to the King of England and received a generous annuity from him. His three *balades*, here translated by Chaucer, were discovered some years ago by Dr. A. Piaget. They are printed by Skeat in the *Oxford Chaucer* (I. 400-404) below the text of this poem. A comparison of the translation with the original shows that Chaucer's rendering is rather free, although he adheres much more closely to his French text than in his translation of the *A. B. C.*

In one of the manuscripts, Shirley remarks, at the close of the *Compleynt of Venus*, "Hit is sayde that Graunson made this last balade for Venus resembled to my lady of York, aunswering the complaynt of Mars." Accordingly, it has sometimes been assumed that the princess, to whom Chaucer's envoy is addressed, was Isabel,



Duchess of York, the daughter of King Pedro of Castille. Some manuscripts, however, carry the reading "Princes" in the first line of the envoy, and the connection of the poem with the Duchess of York, like the dubious tradition that the *Compleynt of Mars* was based upon her intrigue with the Duke of Exeter, rests upon very slight evidence. The inappropriate title of the poem may probably be attributed to Shirley.

In 1391, Granson left Savoy, under suspicion of being concerned in the death of Count Amadeus VII, and probably went at once to England. Two years later, upon the confiscation of his estates in Savoy, he was awarded his annuity by Richard II. It seems probable that the *balades* came into Chaucer's hands and were translated by him not long after 1391.

"THE COMPLEINT OF CHAUCER TO HIS EMPTY PURSE"

(Extant in eight Mss., some of which omit the envoy)

*Authenticity:* Ascribed to Chaucer in three Mss., one of them probably derived from Shirley.

*Date:* 1399.

*Source:* Possibly suggested by a *balade* of Eustache Deschamps.

*Metrical Form:* *Balade* in three stanzas, in rime-royal; with an envoy of five lines, riming *aabba*.

The envoy can be dated with the closest accuracy. The "conquerour of Brutes Albioun" was Henry IV, who was declared king in parliament on September 30, 1399. On October 13, the new king granted Chaucer a pension of forty marks a year, in addition to the annuity of £20

given him in 1394 by Richard II. The envoy, then, must have been written during the first two weeks of October, 1399. Skeat calls it "almost certainly Chaucer's latest extant composition."

The rest of the poem, on the other hand, may have been in existence before 1399, and it is possible that it had already done Chaucer a service with Henry's predecessor upon the throne,—say in aiding him to secure the pension of 1394. In one of the manuscripts, the poem is called "A supplicacion to Kyng Richard by chaucier"; but as this particular copy includes the envoy, the statement would appear to be a mistake.

Skeat compares this *balade* with one by Deschamps, addressed to Charles VI, but he does not argue that Chaucer owed more to the French poet than the suggestion for his own petition.

#### "PROVERBS"

(Three Ms. copies extant)

*Authenticity:* Dubious. Ascribed to Chaucer in two of the Mss.

*Date:* ?

*Source:* Probably French proverbial expressions.

*Metrical Form:* Four-line stanzas, with four stresses to the line, riming alternately.

Although the proverbs were accepted by Skeat, they are of doubtful authenticity. One copy occurs in a Shirley manuscript without anything to indicate that the poems are Chaucer's. They are certainly of little value. The only point about them of particular interest is the recurrence of the idea of the second proverb in the *Melibeus*:

"For the proverbe seith, he that to muche embraceth,  
distreyneth litel" (*Cant. Tales*, B. 2404).

"AGAINST WOMEN UNCONSTANT"

(Three Ms. copies extant)

*Authenticity*: Doubtful. No mark of authorship in the Mss.

*Date*: ?

*Source*: Idea and refrain from a poem by Machaut.

*Metrical Form*: Three stanzas in rime-royal, using only three rimes throughout.

This poem was first attributed to Chaucer by Stow, in the 1561 Chaucer, and some scholars refuse to accept it as genuine. Skeat, however, included it in the canon. One of the arguments which he used to support the poem's claims to authenticity was the fact that "the general idea of the poem, and what is more important, the whole of the refrain, are taken from Chaucer's favourite author Machaut (ed. Tarbé, p. 56); whose refrain is—En lieu de bleu, Damē, vous vestez vert." The point of this line lies in the fact that blue was the color of constancy, green of inconstancy.

"AN AMOROUS COMPLEINT"

(Three Ms. copies extant)

*Authenticity*: Doubtful. Not ascribed to Chaucer in any of the Mss.

*Date*: ?

*Source*: None has been suggested.

*Metrical Form*: Rime-royal.

This poem, first attributed to Chaucer by Skeat, is not of sufficient merit to justify its admission to the canon. Skeat argued for its authenticity on the ground that it is to be found in three manuscripts which contain several of Chaucer's poems, and that it contains lines and expressions closely resembling some which occur in the accepted works. I should be far more ready to attribute these resemblances, not excluding the striking similarity between the first two lines of the last stanza and lines 309-10 of the *Parlement of Foules*, to a natural tendency on the part of an inferior writer to imitate the works of the greatest poet of the age. An argument based upon the inclusion of the poem in manuscripts which contain very large and miscellaneous collections of prose and verse, is hardly convincing. It is to be added that Skeat himself came to be doubtful of the poem's authenticity.

"A BALADE OF COMPLEYNT"

(Only one Ms. copy extant)

*Authenticity*: Doubtful. No mark of authorship in the Ms.

*Date*: ?

*Source*: None has been suggested.

*Metrical Form*: Three stanzas in rime-royal.

This poem, discovered by Skeat and first printed by him in 1888, has not been generally accepted as authentic, and Skeat himself eventually excluded it from the canon.

The fact that it occurs in a Shirley manuscript, without any indication of Chaucerian authorship, is a strong argument against its authenticity.

## "WOMANLY NOBLESSE"

(Only one Ms. copy extant)

*Authenticity:* Ascribed to Chaucer in the Ms.

*Date:* Early?

*Source:* No source has been discovered.

*Metrical Form:* *Balade* in three stanzas with an envoy. Each stanza has nine lines, riming *aabaabbab*, on the same two rimes throughout. The envoy has six lines, riming *acacaa*, keeping one of the rimes of the stanzas.

The manuscript in which Skeat discovered this poem calls it a "Balade that Chauncier made." It is possible that this manuscript, though not in Shirley's hand, as Skeat has indicated, was derived from a Shirley copy. With this much of external evidence behind it, the poem has gained wider acceptance than some of the others which Skeat endeavored to add to the canon.

The *Complaint to my Mortal Foe*, and the *Complaint to my Lode-Sterre*, both discovered by Skeat, and first printed by him in the *Athenaeum*, in 1894, have not been generally accepted. Skeat included them in the *Oxford Chaucer* (IV. xxvii-xxxi), but he himself was not entirely ready to admit them to the canon.

## "BOECE"

(Extant in ten Mss., two containing only part of the translation)

*Authenticity:* Mentioned in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, in the 'Retraction' and in the Words *unto Adam*.

*Date:* Shortly after 1380.

*Source:* The Latin text of Boethius: *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, the commentary of Nicholas Trivet, and a French translation (probably that of Jean de Meun).

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, whom Gibbon called "the last of the Romans whom Cato or Tully could have acknowledged for their countryman," was put to death, by order of Theodoric, in 524 A. D. His most famous work, the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, was written while he lay in prison in Ticinum, the modern Pavia. No man has expressed more eloquently the comfort which the philosophy of the classic world could bring to a man, even in the sadder days of its decline; and no man ever stood more sorely in need of any comfort he could find. Born in a distinguished Roman family, he had spent his years in the service of the state, recognized in the Senate as its most distinguished member and received by Theodoric on terms of intimate friendship. In 510, through royal favor, he had been made sole consul. He had married the daughter of a senator, and the two sons she bore him had been chosen consuls together in 522. His good fortune had naturally made him the object of many little jealousies, and his fearless opposition to all oppressive or ill-advised measures had won him the ill will of many unscrupulous persons who were in a position to do him injury. Accused of treason to Theodoric, in that he sought to maintain the integrity of the Senate and hoped to restore the ancient liberties of Rome, he was thrown into prison, his goods were confiscated, and he was finally put to death.

The great book which Boethius wrote in prison was not his only contribution to the literature of philosophy. Throughout his life, he had busied himself with the works

of the philosophers of ancient Greece, and it had been his ambition to translate all the works of Plato and Aristotle and to quicken the stagnant intellectual life of his century, by streams of thought brought from the pages of Greek speculative literature. Though he never realized this ambition, he did very much to bring the fruits of Greek speculation, in many different fields of thought, within the reach of the readers of his age and of subsequent centuries. His writings include an interpretation of Euclid, a work on music based upon the thought of Pythagoras, an adaptation of the writings of Nicomachus upon arithmetic, and more than thirty books based on the works of Aristotle, who held his place of supreme importance in mediæval thought largely because the translations and commentaries of Boethius made his works accessible.

Of all his writings, no other has the power or beauty of the *Consolation of Philosophy*, and it is that work which accounts for the enormous influence which he exercised over mediæval thought. The book was translated into English, German, Italian, Spanish, and Greek before the end of the fifteenth century, and its influence spread from one end of mediæval Europe to the other, eclipsing that of any other book. King Alfred the Great rendered it into Anglo-Saxon, and there is a tradition that Queen Elizabeth improved her leisure by translating it in her turn.

One factor which contributed to the high esteem in which the *Consolation of Philosophy* was held during the Middle Ages was the belief that Boethius was a Christian and died a martyr to the faith. Under the name of St. Severinus, he was venerated as one of the Great Christian heroes of the pagan world; and in the book which he had written in prison, the Middle Ages believed that they

had found an eloquent expression of the power of the Christian religion to bring philosophic comfort to a man in trouble. In this they were mistaken. No book written in the sixth century could have been entirely without traces of the influence of Christianity; but the magnificent lady who comes to Boethius in Book I of his work, to console him as he bewails his misfortune, is not Religion, but Philosophy. She talks with him about the omnipotence of God; she teaches him that the gifts of Fortune are of little value, and that the best happiness of man is to be found in God, who alone is the absolute good; she shows him that evil, so far from flourishing as he supposes, has no real existence at all, since it is no part of God, who alone has true existence; she solves for him the ancient riddle of man's free will and God's foreknowledge, by instructing him in the difference between time, in which man lives, and eternity, in which God sees at once the past, the present, and the future. These are, of course, matters which belong to the philosophy of religion, but they are presented by Boethius in the light of pagan thought, rather than of Christian revelation. His philosophy is a blend of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics.<sup>48</sup>

In all probability, Chaucer made the acquaintance of Boethius through the *Roman de la Rose*, and it is possible that he was led to undertake his translation by the suggestion of Jean de Meun that

'twould redound  
Greatly to that man's praise who should  
Translate that book with masterhood.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. H. F. Stewart: *Boethius: an Essay* (London, 1891), an excellent study of the subject.



The only direct evidence for dating the translation is the reference in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. If we are right in dating the earlier version of the Prologue in 1385-6, the "Boece" must have been completed before that date. It has usually been assigned to the period of the *Troilus*, partly on the evidence of the *Words unto Adam*, where "Boece" and "Troilus" are mentioned in the same line, as if they were works which Chaucer's scribe had been copying at the same time, and partly because the influence of the thought of Boethius is so apparent in the *Troilus*.

The problem of the source of Chaucer's translation is more complicated than would at first appear, for his text contains unmistakable evidence that he was working with other appliances before him than the bare Latin text. It now appears certain that he availed himself of a French translation—probably Jean de Meun's—and that many of his interpolations (distinguished in Skeat's text by the use of italics) were derived from a long commentary, by Nicholas Trivet, upon the Latin original.

The translation is disappointing reading for the admirer of Chaucer. Partly because prose was not so happy a medium for his genius as poetry, and partly because his style has been cramped by the difficulties of translating a work which was a little beyond his powers as a Latinist, Chaucer has produced a work that is quite without the ease and fluency which we particularly associate with his writing. Considered as a translation, it comes far from meeting modern standards. "Its inaccuracy and infelicity," says H. F. Stewart, "is not that of an inexperienced Latin scholar, but rather of one who was no Latin scholar at all." This statement is a little severe and takes too little

account of the extraordinary difficulties which stood in the path of the translator, in days before the apparatus of modern scholarship had been thought of. Nevertheless, more than a hundred errors have been pointed out in Chaucer's translation. He misses the point of historical allusions; he loses the force of conjunctions, prepositions, and pronouns; he translates interrogatory statements as if they were declarative; he ignores or misplaces negatives and misreads words; and at times he translates so literally that his English is quite without meaning, at least to the modern reader.

But if Chaucer did not succeed in translating the *De Consolatione Philosophiae* to the entire satisfaction of those who would like to find him supreme in every sort of writing, it must be said that he had made the thought of Boethius thoroughly his own. The influence of the pagan philosopher appears again and again in his work, and some of the most serious passages in his poetry have their source in the *Consolation of Philosophy*.<sup>49</sup>

### "THE HOUS OF FAME"

(Extant in three Mss., two of 2158 lines, one of 1843 lines)

*Authenticity:* Mentioned in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* and in the 'Retraction.'

*Date:* 1374-82.

*Source:* No source for the poem as a whole. Details from many writers.

*Metrical Form:* Octosyllabics.

<sup>49</sup> The nature of Chaucer's translation and the influence of Boethius upon his works are admirably discussed in B. L. Jefferson's monograph, *Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy*.

The lines in which the eagle describes the manner of life which the poet has been leading indicate that the *Hous of Fame* belongs to the period when Chaucer was serving as controller of the customs; i. e., between 1374 and 1385. It is now generally believed that the poem preceded the *Troilus*, and a date not too long after 1374 may be accepted with some confidence.

The *Hous of Fame* reflects Chaucer's widening intellectual interests. The hackneyed mechanism of the "dream school" of poetry, which is utilized at the beginning, was derived from the mediæval French poets who had exercised the strongest influence upon Chaucer at the outset of his career. Chaucer is no longer ready, however, to accept any convention without giving it fresh treatment of his own, and he has enlivened the stale device of the dream by an introductory passage, in which he summarizes, in one long, breathless sentence, the mediæval psychology of dreams, as presented in the commentary of Macrobius upon the *Dream of Scipio*.<sup>50</sup>

The influence of other and greater writers than the French poets of the fourteenth century soon makes itself apparent. The conception, and part of the description, of the House of Fame came from Ovid (*Metamorphoses*, XII. 39-63). Further evidence of Chaucer's familiarity with the same work is to be found in the many allusions which he makes in Book II to myths related by Ovid, and the eagle's reference to the *Metamorphoses* as "thyn owne book" (line 712) may be regarded as reliable evidence that Chaucer actually possessed a copy of this particular work. Familiarity with Ovid's *Heroides*, a work which

<sup>50</sup> Cf. W. C. Curry: *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences*, 233-40.

furnished the material for much of the *Legend of Good Women*, is put beyond question by lines 388-426; and other references point toward the *Ars Amatoria* and the *Ex Ponto*.

Chaucer was undoubtedly well acquainted with Ovid long before the *Hous of Fame* was begun. It is not so clear that his acquaintance with Vergil was of long standing. The fact that he takes occasion to furnish his readers with a digest of the *Aeneid* suggests that Skeat is right in his conjecture that "at the time of writing, Vergil was, in the main, a new book to him." The description of *Fame* herself owes something to Vergil's passage on *Fama* (*Aeneid*, IV. 176-83). That the lady is endowed with "partriches winges" is due to an unfortunate misreading, either by Chaucer or by the scribe whose manuscript he was following, of Vergil's "*pernicibus alis*."

There can hardly be any question about the source of Chaucer's newly awakened interest in Vergil, for it was undoubtedly Dante who had given him a new sense of Vergil's greatness. No poem of Chaucer's shows more striking evidence of the influence of the *Divine Comedy* than the *Hous of Fame*. Passages translated or imitated from Dante are scattered through the poem, and an attempt has been made to show that certain features of the work, such as the eagle, the desert, and the steep rock, have their source in the *Divine Comedy*. Doubtless, too much has been made, by certain writers, of accidental similarities between the two poems, and some of the "parallel passages" which have been discovered bear only the most tenuous relation to each other.<sup>51</sup> It is certainly diffi-

<sup>51</sup> Cf. A. Rambeau: *Chaucers Hous of Fame in seinem Verhältniss zu Dantes Divina Commedia*, in *Englische Studien*, 3. 209-68;

cult to agree with those who argue that this is the poem which Lydgate had in mind when he declared that Chaucer wrote a work which he called "Dante in Inglissh."<sup>52</sup> The one conclusion that can definitely be accepted, out of the theories which have been put forward about the relation between the *Hous of Fame* and the *Divine Comedy*, is that Chaucer must have been reading Dante with unusually close attention at the time when he wrote this poem.

The fact that the *Hous of Fame* breaks off abruptly, upon what appears to be an indication that tidings of great importance are about to be communicated to the reader, has led to some speculation about Chaucer's purpose in writing the poem. Rudolf Immelmann has put forward the theory that the poem was projected as a companion piece to the *Parlement of Foules*: as that poem was written to celebrate the betrothal of Anne of Bohemia to Richard II, so the *Hous of Fame* was undertaken, about December 10, 1381, as a congratulatory poem to be presented to Anne on her arrival in England; and it was left unfinished because the interval before the princess landed (December 18) proved to be too short for the completion of the work.<sup>53</sup> Professor Manly rejects this theory and puts forth one of his own, declaring that he is "disposed to believe that this poem was intended to herald or announce a group of love stories and to serve as a sort of prologue to them."<sup>54</sup>

and C. Chiarini: *Di una imitazione inglese della Divina Commedia*, Bari, 1902. An admirable discussion of Chaucer and Dante is to be found in an article by C. Looten in the *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, V. 545-71.

<sup>52</sup> Prologue to the *Fall of Princes*, 303.

<sup>53</sup> *Englische Studien*, 45. 397-431.

<sup>54</sup> *What is Chaucer's Hous of Fame?* in the *Kittredge Anniversary Papers* (Boston, 1913), 73-81.

Professor Sypherd, on the other hand, rejects every theory which endeavors to discover a hidden significance in the *Hous of Fame*, and argues that the poem is complete in itself, save for a brief conclusion which the poet failed to write. "I shall be satisfied," he says, "to regard it as a love-vision poem, in which the poet realizes to the fullest extent the possibilities of the device of a journey as a reward for his services in the cause of Love. Employing such rich poetic material as the combined classical conception of the goddess of Fama and the abstract idea of worldly reputation, the journey of the 'grete poete of Itaile' through the lower world and to the abode of the blessed, and the conventional device of the love-vision, Chaucer has given us in the *Hous of Fame* a complete poem, rich in thought and fancy, in story and significance." <sup>55</sup>

#### "THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN"

(Extant in twelve Mss. several of which contain only fragments of the poem)

*Authenticity:* Mentioned, as "the Seintes Legende of Cupyde" in the Introduction to the Man of Law's Prologue; attributed to Chaucer by Lydgate (*Fall of Princes*).

*Date:* 1386-95.

*Source:* Discussed below.

*Metrical Form:* The heroic couplet, here used for the first time in English poetry.

A manuscript in the Cambridge University Library offers a version of the Prologue to the *Legend of Good*

<sup>55</sup> *Mod. Lang. Notes*, 30. 65-68. An interesting hypothesis by B. H. Bronson is noted under Bibliography.

*Women* which differs materially from that contained in the other manuscripts. It alters the order of many passages, includes some lines which do not appear elsewhere, and omits lines which are found in other copies of the poem. The most notable singularity of this version of the Prologue is the omission of the "dedication" to Queen Anne, contained in lines B 496, 497:

And whan this book is maad, yive hit the quene  
On my behalfe, at Eltham, or at Shene.

The unique version of this Cambridge manuscript (designated as the A-text in Skeat's edition) was for many years regarded as the earlier form of the Prologue. It is now the general opinion that this text represents a later recension. The B-text was probably written in 1385 or 1386, after Chaucer had terminated his duties at the Customs House, had left London, and had taken up his residence in the country. References to the *Hous of Fame* and to the *Troilus and Criseyde*, in lines B 417 and B 332, support this date for the Prologue; and the first two hundred lines give the very definite impression that the poet had left the city and was residing in the country.

That the *Legend* was undertaken to please the queen, if not at her specific request, as Lydgate says, seems certain. The identification of Alceste with Queen Anne is not quite so certain, but the respect which the poet shows, both for Alceste and for "hir flour, the dayesye," suggests the devotion of the courtier. The revised text may safely be assigned to a date after 1394, the year in which Queen Anne died. King Richard, in his grief at the loss of his queen, tore down the palace at Sheen, which had been her favorite residence, and avoided everything which

might remind him of her. The omission of the "dedication" to Queen Anne from the A-text and the modification of some of the more ardent expressions of devotion to the daisy make it appear likely that Chaucer's revision of the Prologue was undertaken at a time when such pointed references to his "lady sovereyne" would not have been acceptable to the king. The ultimate date for the revised version of the Prologue may be set at 1395.

The use of the conventional device of the dream at once suggests the influence of the French poets of courtly love. The entire Prologue, indeed, is written in the spirit of that school of poetry. We are not only brought at once into the ideal springtime landscape so familiar to readers of the dream poems of the later Middle Ages; the poem reflects the traditions of courtly love in more essential matters than its setting, and concludes by representing the author himself before the bar of a court of love. The charge brought against him is one which can be understood only in the light of the tradition that poets had it as their principal function to glorify love and to sing the praise of women; and the penance laid upon him is intended to bring him back into the fold of conventional love poetry, after his dereliction in writing of *Criseyde* and in translating a work which contains the satiric utterances of Jean de Meun.

It is hardly necessary to point out the passages which reflect this conventional atmosphere, so frequently encountered in Chaucer's earlier works. Of more significance, perhaps, is the evidence that certain specific poems by fourteenth-century French authors had recently been exerting an influence upon the poet. A literary fad, which has been called the "Cult of the Daisy," had been in-



augurated by Guillaume de Machaut, in the *Dit de la Marguerite*, wherein the daisy receives extravagant praise, presumably because the King of Cyprus, for whom the poem was written, was in love with a lady who bore the name of Marguerite. Froissart, in his *Dittie de la Flour de la Marguerite* and his *Paradys d'Amours*, adopted the convention thus inaugurated by Machaut; and Deschamps followed suit in several of his poems, notably his *Lay de Franchise*. That Chaucer was familiar with the marguerite-poems of Deschamps and Froissart has been put beyond question by Professor Lowes;<sup>56</sup> and it is quite possible that the structure of the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* was influenced, in some measure, by the *Lay de Franchise* and the *Paradys d'Amours*. It is to be said, however, that no poem which has yet been discovered can be definitely called a source of the Prologue.

For the Legends, on the other hand, various definite sources can usually be assigned.<sup>57</sup> The *Legend of Cleopatra* reveals less direct borrowing than the others. It was probably derived, in part, from the fourth book of the *Epitome Rerum Romanorum* by L. Annaeus Florus, a Roman historian of the second century. It is also possible that Chaucer had seen a Latin translation of Plutarch's *Life of Antony*. The story of Cleopatra is to be found in Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus*, and in his *De Casibus Virorum et Feminarum Illustrium*, and Chaucer may have consulted these works. The description of the battle of Actium has obviously been influenced by accounts of battles at sea

<sup>56</sup> *Publ. Mod. Lang. Assn.* 19. 593-683.

<sup>57</sup> The sources of the Legends are fully discussed by Bech in an article in *Anglia* (5. 313-82), which also considers the relation between the Legends and the similar stories told by Gower in the *Confessio Amantis*.

that had been fought in the poet's own times.

The *Legend of Thisbe of Babylon* is based upon Ovid: *Metamorphoses*, IV. 55-166. Chaucer follows his original very closely; but he fails to tell us that the trysting-tree was "a faire high Mulberie with fruit as white as snow," and he has had the good taste to omit from Thisbe's dying speech her injunction to the tree to bear black fruit henceforward, in token of the tragedy which has taken place beneath its boughs.

The *Legend of Dido, Queen of Carthage* is retold from the *Aeneid* Books I-IV. Chaucer shows characteristic freedom by rearranging his material in chronological order. "Myn autour," from whom he quotes the letter which Dido wrote "before that she deyde," is Ovid (*Heroides*, Epistle VII. 1-8).

The first twenty-eight lines of the *Legend of Hypsipyle and Medea* are undoubtedly original with Chaucer. The rest of the legend is based very largely upon Guido delle Colonne (*Historia Troiana*, Books I and II). The letters of the two heroines are from the sixth and twelfth epistles of Ovid's *Heroides*, in a very much abridged form, which seems to indicate that the poet was growing a little weary of the lamentations and reproaches of Cupid's saints. Although he refers specifically to the *Argonauticon* of Valerius Flaccus, the evidence that he made any use of that work is exceedingly slight.

In the fourth line of the *Legend of Lucretia*, Chaucer refers to "Ovyde and Titus Livius" as if they were his sources. As a matter of fact, his legend is derived almost entirely from Ovid (*Fasti*, II. 721-852), and at times his version is little more than a translation. Livy's account

of Lucrece is to be found in Book I, chapters 57-59. The allusion to "the grete Austin," in line 1690, seems to indicate that Chaucer had seen the commentary of St. Augustine upon the story (*De Civitate*, chapter xix).

The *Legend of Ariadne* begins by following, rather closely, the account given by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* (VII. 456-58, VIII. 6-176); and the ending is obviously based on the *Heroides*, Epistle X. Dr. Meech has shown that the treatment of the story indicates use of the *Ovide Moralisé* or of Filippo's translation of the *Heroides*.

The *Legend of Philomela* is based throughout upon Ovid (*Metamorphoses*, VI. 426-605), but Chaucer has incorporated some suggestions from a work by Chrétien de Troyes which he encountered in the *Ovide Moralisé*.

C. G. Child, in an article in *Modern Language Notes* (II. 476-90), has demonstrated that the *Legend of Phyllis* contains material to be found in Boccaccio's *De Genealogia Deorum*. Similar material, however, appears in Filippo's Italian translation of Ovid (*Heroides*, II), which Chaucer seems to have consulted.

The *Legend of Hypermnestra* is taken from Ovid (*Heroides*, Epistle XIV), but some details may be traced to Filippo's translation. The story also appears in the *Fables* of Hyginus, but there is very little reason to believe that Chaucer consulted this work. Professor Curry, who is perhaps a little too ready to discover a predominant influence of astrology in the shaping of characters in Chaucer's poetry, believes that the poet has sought to "rationalize the life and character of Hypermnestra," according to the scientific method, by providing her with

a horoscope which would account for the fact that she alone, among the fifty daughters of Aegyptus, failed to slay her husband at her father's command. "Venus's influence, it would seem, is responsible for Hypermnestra's beauty of person and for the partial suppression of Mars's malice; and Jupiter, joined in some benevolent aspect with Venus, has been most powerful in the creation of her gentle, sympathetic character and her marital fidelity. As the heavens revolve, however, the progress of Saturn into a position of evil aspect results in her untimely death." <sup>58</sup>

The *Legend of Good Women* has been a favorite battle ground of Chaucerian scholarship. The problem presented by the two versions of the Prologue and the difficulty of identifying Alceste, to the satisfaction of minds that are trained to seek scientific precision even in the works of the poets, have between them provided the learned journals with many pages of controversy, to which the present writer will not so much as refer his readers. The important matter of the chronological relation between the two versions of the Prologue has happily emerged from the dust of controversy, and only the most sceptical will care to retrace the steps in the long and arduous struggle which has ended in establishing the priority of the B-version. For the settlement of the other problem, the identification of Alceste, we must await the return to this troubled planet of Geoffrey Chaucer himself, who alone can speak with final authority upon the subject. Nothing short of his word, one would surmise, will put an end to the discussion.

<sup>58</sup> *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences*, 164-71.

## "TRETIS OF THE ASTROLABIE"

(Extant in 24 Mss.)

*Authenticity:* Ascribed to Chaucer in one of the Mss. and by Lydgate.

*Date:* 1391.

*Source:* Based very largely on Messahala: *Compositio et Operatio Astrolabie*.

Chaucer's *Treatise on the Astrolabe* is an attempt to describe in simple English, intelligible to a boy of ten, the structure and use of an instrument employed, from very ancient times, to determine the altitude of the sun and stars and to work out various other problems in astronomy. The Prologue promises five parts, but the work breaks off before the second part is brought to an end.

In the Prologue, Chaucer speaks of treatises on the Astrolabe in Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin, and professes to be merely "a lewd compilatour of the labour of olde Astrologiens." He makes it very clear, however, that Latin works on the subject formed the principal source of his own treatise; and Skeat, following a suggestion by Henry Bradshaw, discovered the particular work to which Chaucer was chiefly indebted. It was a Latin version of the *Compositio et Operatio Astrolabie*, by Messahala, an Arabian astronomer, who lived in the eighth century. The full text of this treatise is printed in Skeat's edition of Chaucer's Astrolabe, published by the Early English Text Society, in 1872. The first and longer portion of the work, which describes in detail the making of an Astrolabe, has little bearing upon Chaucer's treatise,

since the "suffisaunt Astrolabie" which he had given "litell Lowis" was probably procured ready-made; but he has made generous use of the second part, which describes the operation of the instrument. His own Part I is founded very closely upon Messahala, though he has expanded his original frequently for the sake of greater clarity. In Part II, he has drawn about two-thirds of his material from Messahala, sometimes translating almost word for word. The works of other astronomers and astrologians probably furnished him with the rest of his "conclusiouns."

Two references in Part II to "the yeer of oure Lord 1391," make it appear likely that the Treatise was composed in that year. The fact that the tables, which the treatise promised but did not include, were to be calculated "aftur the latitude of Oxenford" has led to the assumption that "litell Lowis" was a student at Oxford. One of the manuscripts has a colophon which states that the Treatise was "*compilatus per Galfridum Chauciers ad Filium suum Lodewicum, scolarem tunc temporis Oxonie, ac sub tutela illius nobilissimi philosophi Magistri N. Strode.*" The colophon, however, is added to the manuscript in a later hand and is probably a mere conjecture.

## CHAPTER IV

### TROILUS AND CRISEYDE SOURCES

#### BENOIT DE SAINTE-MAURE

THE story of Troilus and his faithless mistress was first told by Benoit of Sainte-Maure, a French poet of the twelfth century. His *Roman de Troie* (ca. 1160), a long poem in octosyllabic couplets, was founded very largely upon two works which mediæval readers believed to be accounts by eye-witnesses of the siege of Troy. His principal source was the *Darctis Phrygii De Excidio Trojae Historia*, which purported to be a translation, by Nepos, of a document discovered by the translator at Athens. No one would now think of attributing its dull Latin prose to Nepos, nor does anyone believe that the *Historia* originated with Dares the Phrygian, described by Homer as a priest of Hephaestus, dwelling in Troy. (*Iliad* 5.9). Benoit, however, doubtless accepted the work as a dependable history, and he based the first three-fifths of his romance very largely upon the account of "Dares," imitating his source in tracing the story of Troy back to its most remote origins in the Argonautic expedition. Out of the fifty-two pages of Latin text, he spun the first 24,425 lines of his romance.

For the remaining portion of his poem, Benoit drew also

upon another eye-witness account of the siege, the *Ephemeris Belli Trojani*, attributed to Dictys the Cretan, who was supposed to have taken a share in the capture of Troy, among the allies of Idomeneus of Crete. A Latin version of the *Ephemeris*, belonging to the fourth century, A. D., and purporting to be the work of one Septimius Romanus, informs us that the original was a diary kept in Phœnician characters by Dictys, during the siege, and later recovered from his tomb. The story of the diary, of the tin case in which it was buried beside its author, and of the discriminating earthquake which rescued so important a document from oblivion, is obviously a hoax. That the Latin version, however, was actually based upon a Greek original has been put beyond doubt, by the discovery, in 1899, of a papyrus containing a portion of the Greek "Dictys."

In neither of these sources did Benoit de Sainte-Maure find any suggestion of the love-story of Troilus. The young prince himself takes a conspicuous part in many of the battle-scenes of "Dares," who describes him as follows: "*Troilum magnum, pulcherrimum, pro ætate valentem, fortem, cupidum virtutis.*" We are also informed that on one occasion, Troilus wounded Diomedes, but there is not the faintest hint that the two were rivals in love. Criseyde, who appears as Briseida in both Dares and Benoit, is thus described by the former: "*Briseidam formosam, non alta statura, candidam, capillo flavo et molli, superciliis iunctis, oculis venustis, corpore æquali, blandam, affabilem, verecundam, animo simplici, piam.*" This description is the only reference to the lady in the work of "Dares," who entirely omits the story of Hippodamia, daughter of Brises (Briseis or Briseida), the



slave girl who was taken from Achilles by Agamemnon.

"Dictys," on the other hand, relates the story of the daughter of Brises, but he calls her Hippodamia, never employing the patronymic Briseis, or Briseida. Of Troilus, he has less to say than "Dares," but he gives us a brief account of the prince's death and of the mourning which it caused among the Trojans.

Out of such fragmentary references in his sources, Benoit wove the story of the love of Troilus for the faithless Briseida. It is clear that he did not understand the Greek patronymic forms and therefore did not identify Hippodamia, whose story he took over from the pages of "Dictys," with the Briseida whom he found described by "Dares." He seems to have felt that so charming a lady should be provided with a love-story, and he proceeded to invent one for her, quite unconscious of the fact that the heroine of this new amour was the very daughter of Brises, for whose favors he represents Achilles and Agamemnon as contending.

Benoit's account of the loves of Troilus and Briseida is but an episode, woven into his story of the siege of Troy. It occupies, in all, only 1349 lines out of the 30,316 of the *Roman de Troie*, beginning at Line 13,065. The story, as Benoit presents it, runs as follows:

At a conference between the Greeks and Trojans, called at the request of the Greeks, Antenor is exchanged for King Thoas; and Calchas, in debate with Priam, wins assent to his request for the restoration of his daughter, Briseida. The reader gains his first knowledge of the love of Troilus and Briseida from the lamentations of the lovers when they hear of their approaching separation. They spend the night together grieving; and on the next

morning, Briseida takes her departure from Troy, Troilus leading her horse. The poet pictures her grief but assures us she will soon be comforted with a new love, pausing, at this point, to reflect upon the inconstancy of woman. Diomedes, who escorts Briseida from the walls of Troy to the Greek camp, begins his wooing, but is met by discreet evasions. Briseida informs him that she is now too sad to think of love, but assures him that she would hold no man dearer than Diomedes, if she were to love at all.

In her father's tent, Briseida receives the greetings of the Greek chieftains; and in three days, Benoit tells us, she has forgotten her desire to return to Troy. Diomedes, however, makes but slow progress in his suit. He presents her with a steed which he has taken from Troilus in battle; but she receives the gift, at the hands of his messenger, with a speech in which she sings the praises of Troilus and warns Diomedes that the capture of the horse will be avenged. Her warning is speedily justified, for the Trojan Polydamas unhorses Diomedes and seizes his mount for Troilus.

During a six-months' truce, which presently ensues, Diomedes suffers from the cruelty of Briseida, who becomes more perverse as she is assured of his love. For many days, he begs her mercy in vain. Toward the end of the truce, however, she is persuaded to grant him her sleeve to carry into battle as a favor. She consents, also, to his riding the horse which he captured from Troilus; and we are told that her love for the Trojan prince is "*quassee*" (*cassée*). Going into battle with Briseida's favor, Diomedes encounters Troilus. Their first combat is interrupted; but in a second encounter, some weeks later, Troilus wounds his rival so seriously that he is carried

from the field. Pity for the wounded Diomedes completes the conquest of Briseida, who visits him often, to nurse and comfort him, no longer dissembling her love. She realizes that her infidelity to Troilus has destroyed her fair fame, but resolves to be true to her new lover.

Troilus, in despair at her treachery, fights the more fiercely, on that account, and succeeds in unhorsing the great Achilles. In the next battle, however, Troilus is surrounded and unhorsed by the Myrmidons, and before he can rise, he is slain by Achilles. The mourning for Troilus and the lament of Hecuba bring the episode to a close.

The story extends to Line 21,782 of the *Roman*, for it has been frequently interrupted by other matters,—battles, truces, the death and funeral of Hector, the love of Achilles for Polyxena, etc. Troilus, however, takes a prominent part in many of these episodes. His love-story and his exploits together furnish a large part of the interest for nearly 9,000 consecutive lines of Benoit's poem.

#### GUIDO DELLE COLONNE

A paraphrase of Benoit's *Roman de Troie*, written in Latin prose and entitled *Historia Trojana*, was produced in 1287 by a Sicilian, named Guido delle Colonne. Guido cites Dictys and Dares as his authorities, although his debt to either of them was certainly slight, and makes no mention of the French romance which he was following so closely. It was not until the nineteenth century that the extent of his plagiarism was thoroughly demonstrated. Since he was virtually translating the *Roman de Troie*, with a few abridgments and digressions of his